

On the Trail of **GERONIMO**



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ON THE TRAIL OF GERONIMO



DICK SCREENED HIMSELF BEHIND THE NECK OF THE PONY.

On the Trail of Geronimo

OR

IN THE APACHE COUNTRY

BY

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"PERILS OF THE JUNGLE," "THE WHITE MUSTANG,"
"GOLDEN ROCK," ETC.



NEW YORK
STREET & SMITH
PUBLISHERS

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ON THE TRAIL OF GERONIMO.

CHAPTER I.

AT WEST POINT.

AT last the four years' arduous course at West Point Academy was finished.

Who of us that have been through the study, drill and training at that admirable institution can forget a single day of the eventful term spent there?

With what timidity we made our way up the long, sloping hill to the array of buildings and presented our "appointment," which some of us had brought all the way from the Pacific slope or the Gulf, picturing in our mind what West Point looked like, and how we would conduct ourselves after we got there? And, as is always the case, how different the reality proved from the ideal!

And then what could look more awe inspiring than the upper classmen, as we caught sight of

them here, there, and everywhere, eying us as we can imagine that cannibals might eye a party of prisoners from which they are to select their victims.

It all comes back again. How those grim old physicians, after compelling us to shed every thread of clothing, examined us from head to foot. They thumped our ribs, listened to the heart beats, tested our eyesight, and so on, until we felt as though we would give worlds to get out of the torture room and back again to the farm or shop.

There was Dolph Ashton, who had come all the way from Oregon. He was one of the brightest youths ever born on the Pacific slope, and was intended by nature for a soldier. He stripped like a young Adonis, and his mental attainments were marvelous.

But alas! one of his eyes was a little deficient, and proved unequal to the work of reading a line of fine print shown on the opposite side of the room. Dolph whistled cheerily as he packed his trunk and started for his distant home, but all the same I caught the glint of the tears under his eyelids, which he thought no one of us saw.

We had it pretty rough during the first year.

The upper classmen showed us little mercy. They assumed fierce airs, and thundered all sorts of terrible reproofs when we forgot the "Mr.," or failed to turn the thumbs out or salute, or omitted one of a score of other minor points.

We had to play the servant to those lordly gentlemen, and sing and dance for their amusement. But the hazing was mild, and sometimes we had to laugh at our own performances. Besides, we had the consolation of knowing that one of these days we would emerge from the plebe shell and become upper classmen, and then we would take it out of the unfortunate fellows who came after after us. And didn't we do it?

But I must not be too reminiscent, for I have set out to tell something about another cadet who was at the Academy at the same time as myself, though in another class.

Dick Whitcomb was precisely seventeen years old on the memorable 28th of August when he walked with a sturdy step up the hill from the steamboat landing near the present small station on the West Shore railroad. One hundred others beside himself successfully passed the physical and mental examination, and took up the course of

study, which grows harder each year. A score dropped out at the "exam." six months later, and each semi-annual winnowing disposed of a few more, until over half the class had been "found" as it is termed.

Those were trying days to Dick Whitcomb. He vibrated between the first and second section, but was haunted by the continual horror of landing at the bottom among the "immortals." Not until he had entered upon his last year's course, with his forty odd classmates, can it be said that all fear was removed, and that the real golden sunlight was undimmed by a cloud.

Dick led the memorable last charge down the lower end of the Academy grounds, when his class, mounted on their fiery animals, thundered on a dead run from a point in front of the barracks almost to the steps of the hotel.

It was a thrilling sight, as the forty odd cadets in uniform, yelling like wild Indians, and swinging their sabers first on one side of their steeds and then on the other, clove the skulls of imaginary foes crouching on the ground, with the foam flying from the mouths of the horses, whose blood was at fever heat, for they partook of the stirring

scene which caused the Academic board, the parents of the young officers, their sisters, cousins and aunts and fair admirers to hold their breath while the cyclone swept past them.

Hats were lost, collars flew off, and several animals, taking the bits in their teeth, carried everything before them. Some of those steeds are vicious, and, but for the skill of their riders, two of them would have burst upon the very porch of the hotel, among the ladies, who fled screaming out of their path. Several horses ran away and circled far out on the plain before they could be brought to a halt, champing their bits, their panting sides flecked with foam and their eyes flashing fire.

Dick had one of the worst animals of the lot—a fierce, black mare, which had thrown him many a time when riding in the drill, and which seemed to be inspired with the spirit of Satan himself on that hot day in June.

She felt it was a final contest between her and the handsome cadet, and she meant he should remember it. She would teach him that he was not yet her master.

But Dick was on his mettle, too, as he came

down the plain, striking right and left with his saber, two or three lengths ahead of the cyclone of horsemen behind him, glancing back and shouting like a spirit possessed. There was strength in that left arm which held the reins, and he used his spurs mercilessly. The mare was conquered in the final bout, and Dick was her conqueror.

The sturdy cadet blushed, when it was all over, and he received the congratulations of his friends on the admirable manner in which he had acquitted himself.

"I trembled for you," said pretty Fanny Harland, as she took his arm, and the two walked up and down the piazza of the hotel, after the graduating exercises were completed.

"I had an ugly mare, and she was full of viciousness, but I made up my mind to master her or break her jaw. It never would have done to fail on the last charge, you know," he replied with a smile.

"And now," continued the maiden, glancing up in his proud face, "you are an officer in the United States Army."

"I believe I'm a second lieutenant. It's a pretty long road to a generalship, though, and promotion is slow in these times of peace."

"Do you know in what branch of the service you will serve?"

"The three or four or five, as the case may be, who are lucky enough to lead the rest, go into the engineer corps; then come a few more in the artillery, then the cavalry, while the majority enter the infantry."

"Do you know to which branch you are assigned?"

"The cavalry—my chosen field."

"Do you have to enter upon your duties at once?"

"No; we all have a three months' furlough, at the end of which we must report to our commands. September must find me at Fort Grant, Arizona."

"Why, lieutenant!" exclaimed Miss Harland, with a pretty start; "you will not be far from *my* home!"

"Are you glad?"

"What a question! Papa's ranch is within a hundred miles of Fort Grant, and I hope we shall often see you."

He earnestly reciprocated the wish, and they parted, little dreaming of the circumstances under which they should meet again.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE ROAD TO ARIZONA.

SECOND Lieutenant Dick Whitcomb would have been an extraordinary young man had he not felt a little pride now and then in the fact that he was an officer in the United States army. True, he was pretty well down on the ladder, but he was beginning where his illustrious predecessors began, and at an age somewhat younger than most of them.

Dick traveled by rail to Sacramento, thence by the same means to Los Angeles, and by the Southern Pacific to Yuma. This place is in the extreme southwestern part of Arizona, on the river Gila, and the railroad was finished only to that point. A stage ride of five hundred miles, through one of the hottest regions on the face of the earth, was before him.

The Southern Pacific railway through the southern part of Arizona and New Mexico follows

the old stage route to El Paso, which, as every one knows, is in the extreme western part of Texas. If the reader therefore chooses to trace the course of Lieutenant Whitcomb, he can readily do so. He had been hoping all along that he would be able to time his journey so as to travel most of it as the escort of Miss Fanny Harland. He did not dare propose such an arrangement, but he had managed to learn, without exciting her suspicion, the date on which she expected to start for her father's ranch. So what more annoying discovery can be imagined for one in his situation than the one made at Gila City, where he ascertained that she had gone through just two days before, in a stage in which there were only two other passengers!

No person who has made that stage journey through Southern Arizona, during the hot season, can ever forget it. The roads wind over streams, through mountains, across flaming alkali plains, which in some places are the very types of utter desolation, so that the actual distance is almost doubled. The stage scarcely halted, only long enough for meals or to change horses, which took place every twenty-five miles. They traveled night and day, the seats were uncomfortable as

they could be, and the traveller, who in desperation left the vehicle at some point to obtain a night's rest and to follow in another one, ran the risk of finding every seat taken, and of being forced to wait indefinitely before resuming his journey.

And as for the heat, well!

At Gila City, the thermometer stood at 118 degrees in the shade, when Lieutenant Whitcomb reached that terrible place. Three days before it had registered two degrees higher at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Dick Whitcomb was a plucky fellow, and, though he got a good preliminary baking, he comforted himself with the thought that other army officers had been through the same fiery trial, and it awaited the innumerable procession that was to come after him.

"I can stand it if *they* can," he muttered, compressing his lips, "and some of the fellows now at the Point will suffer the same thing, only they are likely to have the railroad before long."

And so the young officer buckled down to it, and underwent, without a murmur, greater sufferings than had ever fallen to his lot when a plebe at the Academy.

There were three passengers in the stage beside himself—a middle-aged man, his wife, and a speculator, not so old. All were booked for Tucson, though the speculator expected to penetrate further into the interior in the course of a few weeks. The first real comfort of the frightful journey from Yuma was at this quaint adobe city, where the stage paused long enough to give Dick time not only to eat his meals, but to stretch his limbs and wander about the place.

To his surprise, he found that there was but a single passenger beside himself when the journey was resumed. This was a man not more than three or four and twenty, who was evidently a cattleman or cowboy. He wore the broad-brimmed sombrero, a blue shirt without coat or vest, trousers tucked in the tops of his boots, and carried a revolver and repeating Winchester. He had a rather pleasing face, and since he was disposed to be neighborly, and the weather had moderated somewhat, Dick was very glad to meet him half way in the conversation, which the cowboy opened by the natural question :

“I ’spose you’re a young officer going to j’ine your command?”

"Yes," replied Dick. "I am on my way to Fort Grant, where I have to report on the 28th."

"I kind of thought that. My name is Buck Bragg, and I'm going to a ranch fifty miles east of the fort, and well over toward New Mexico."

"Then you're in the cattle business?"

"Yes; I don't own any ranch, but have been working a couple of years for a man that has a mighty nice one, though it ain't very big."

"May I ask the name of your employer?"

"Harland—Caleb Harland."

Lieutenant Whitcomb started.

"Is Mr. Harland an Eastern man?"

"I b'lieve he is, though I don't know exactly what state he come from."

"Has he a daughter named Miss Fanny?"

The man looked at the lieutenant with a quiz-zical grin.

"How'd you come to know *that*?"

"I met a lady about three months ago, named Miss Fanny Harland, who told me that her home was on a ranch in eastern Arizona."

"You hit it the first time! That's the gal, as sure as you're born, and a mighty fine gal she is, too."

"No one who has ever seen her can question *that*," remarked the lieutenant, with tingling cheeks. "Has she returned yet?" he added, with a touch of hypocrisy, for had he not lamented all the way that he was only a couple of days behind her?"

"I reckon she has, though I've been away from home more than a week. She hadn't got back when I left, but they were expecting her every day, and she is a gal that keeps her promise."

CHAPTER III.

“HANDS UP!”

TWO-THIRDS of the way between Tucson and Fort Grant the stage route entered the wildest scenery that Lieutenant Whitcomb had ever beheld. A tributary of the Gila was first crossed, when the double team began laboring up the steep inclines, rattling down the short declivities, and whirling around the narrow ledges of rocks, where a little carelessness on the part of the leaders would have precipitated everything to the bottom of a gorge hundreds of feet deep.

But Zach Emmons had been over the route many times, and could travel when all was as dark as a pocket. He cracked his whip cheerily, called out some encouraging word to his animals, and occasionally exchanged a sentence or two with his passengers.

Dick Whitcomb, although excessively wearied from his long ride, felt more cheerful than at any time since leaving Yuma. First of all, the fearful

temperature had so moderated that existence was no longer a burden. Now and then a refreshing breeze swept through the coach, and fanned his fevered face, while the driver, who was what might be called a "weather sharp," promised him and Buck that it would become still cooler before morning.

There was a moon in the sky, but the straggling clouds rendered the light treacherous and uncertain. Sometimes, when they peered out of the stage, they could see several hundred feet in advance, and again the leaders were hardly visible. The dust, which had been such a plague beyond Tucson, became a great deal less, and the wind carried it all back before it rose to the height of the passenger's seats.

Then Dick's heart beat a trifle faster, when he reflected that if all went well he would reach Fort Grant on the morrow. He was assigned to Company G, Sixth Cavalry, and, from what he had learned since entering Arizona, he would not be kept long waiting for the most arduous kind of service.

"What a good place this would be for road agents," remarked the young officer, as they

began climbing a moderate ascent with the towering rocks and boulders on every side. "Are you ever troubled by such gentlemen?"

"Arizona is a great and glorious country," replied Buck, with an assumption of pride that could not have been wholly genuine, "and there ain't many luxuries that we don't enjoy here. Yes; we have had road agents now and then, and I shouldn't be surprised if we had a visit from some of them to-night."

"And why to-night?"

"Zach has one of Wells and Fargo's treasure boxes on top; don't know how many thousand dollars are in it, but it's a pile the road agents will be mighty glad to go for."

"They may not know about it."

"They have a way of finding out things that makes it mighty hard to give 'em the slip."

"I should think the company would send an extra guard to look after such a valuable treasure."

"They generally do, and I don't understand why they didn't this time. Maybe they thought that 'cause it's been so long since any of the folks bothered the coaches, they have reformed and gone into other business."

"Zach, I notice, has his Winchester beside him."

"Yes; he's game, too!" remarked Buck, admiringly. "I've been in a hold-up with him, and he did more than two men could have done."

"If that's the case, it strikes me that if they *do* stop the stage, we ought to make them hustle."

Buck was evidently pleased with the pluck of the lad, for there are not many who would have talked as he did.

"Put it there!" he exclaimed, reaching his hand across to where the youth was sitting; "the rule is that everybody gets the shivers when they see the shadow of a road agent. I've knowed Bud Zimcoe and a boy to hold up a stage with nine men in it and every one armed, and they cleaned out the whole party. I've got my repeating Winchester and revolver; what have you?"

"Only my Smith & Wesson; but every one of the five chambers is loaded, and I think I know how to use it."

"That's good; it may be, of course, that we shan't be bothered; but if we are, we won't be in a hurry to surrender. I guess we had better have an understanding with Zach."

Thrusting his head out of the side of the coach,

Buck asked the driver to stop his team for a few minutes. This was done, and they held a conference that was to the point.

It will be understood that the driver was necessarily in a situation of peculiar peril, for he was so conspicuous an object that it was the easiest thing in the world for a person to pick him off, without exposing himself to a shot in turn.

Zach was of the opinion that they would be stopped before getting through. It was agreed that if the summons should come he would check his animals as ordered, and then, when the robbers uncovered, the "band would begin to play." Buck and the lieutenant were to do the best they could, while, as Zach expressed it, he would come in the chorus.

"All I've got to warn you against," added Buck Bragg, "is not to be too previous ; wait till you've got things dead to rights, and I give you the signal, and then don't throw away any shots—"

"*Hands up!*"

Strange that at the very moment the plan of action had been agreed upon, the startling summons should come, but so it was.

Lieutenant Whitcomb had braced himself for

the shock, but hearing the command for the first time, his heart beat faster, and the hand which was grasping his revolver clutched the weapon more firmly.

As was anticipated, Zach Emmons brought his horses to a standstill as promptly as if the order came from a military superior, and any one standing at the side of the road could have seen that both hands were extended above his head.

The case was somewhat different within the stage, for there everything was in shadow, and the sharpest vision could not have been certain that the command was obeyed. Nevertheless it was respected.

"Put up your hands, and wait till they come out!" whispered Buck.

Lieutenant Whitcomb did as directed, but he introduced a daring innovation on the custom by retaining his revolver in his right hand. Of course he sought to hold it so that it could not be seen, but the act was almost flying in the face of Providence.

"That won't do!" added Buck, "here they come!"

Two figures emerged from the gloom at the side

of the road, one on either hand, and approached the coach simultaneously.

"How many are in there?" growled the fellow on the right, whose face, as shown in the faint moonlight, was masked.

"Only us two," replied Buck, "and we're poor picking."

"That's the way they all talk; any women folks?"

"Nary a one—what's that in your hand?" suddenly demanded the speaker with an imprecation, as he caught sight of the weapon which Dick Whitcomb slightly shifted just then.

"*That's* what it is!"

With a dexterity that could not have been expected, the lieutenant whirled the pistol around so that the muzzle was pointed at the masked countenance, and let fly.

The aim was a hurried one, but it was accurate, and the villain was hit hard. He staggered backward, muttering exclamations too dreadful to be recorded, while Dick, always taught that what was worth doing at all was worth doing well, fired twice again in rapid succession.

Those gentry are quick to get the drop on an enemy, and the fellow on the other side of the

coach thrust the muzzle of his Winchester with incredible celerity into the vehicle, and fired at Dick, whose full attention was taken up with the other ruffian.

The lieutenant's career would have ended then and there but for his companion. Buck was astonished by the boldness of the youth, but he did not allow the sentiment to handicap his action. Instant to anticipate the action of the other, he seized the muzzle of the rifle and struck it upward, just in time to send the bullet through the top of the coach, and within a few inches of Zach Emmons.

Before the scamp could rally from his discomfiture, the deadly small weapon of the rancher was called into play, and it is safe to say that no man in the Southwest knew how to use it more effectively than he.

It is safe to add, also, that no person in that section of our country was ever subjected to such a terrific personal bombardment as was that particular road agent, inasmuch as the driver, crouching on top of the coach, concluded just then that it was time for him to take a hand in the proceedings. The man he decided to operate upon was the one

who received a couple of well-aimed shots from Buck Bragg's revolver. At the moment that he was reeling backward, he shoved the muzzle almost against the crown of the scamp and fired. Thus three bullets converged in the person of the road agent within a few seconds of each other, and when it is said that any one of them was enough to terminate the career of that particular outlaw, no supplementary information is necessary.

The fellow who received the compliments of Dick Whitcomb's revolver was hit hard, as we have said, but he kept his feet and was able to bring his rifle to a level and send several shots into the coach. They whistled by the faces of both the passengers, but did no harm to either.

No one could have kept a more level head than Zach Emmons. The instant he saw the two agents beaten off, he dropped his rifle and started all four horses on the jump.

Had there been but the two assailants, the danger would have been entirely over, for one was eliminated from the question, and the other was obliged to "sit down." But unfortunately a third member had placed himself some distance up the road in

advance, to act as a guard or sentinel while his companions completed their work.

The presence of the third road agent was not suspected until the lumbering stage was almost upon him.

CHAPTER IV.

TOWARD THE GORGE.

ZACH EMMONS had no thought of the third road agent in front until he almost ran over him.

Naturally supposing that all were grouped together where the hold-up took place, he directed his chief attention toward that point. Having started the horses on a jump, he continually glanced backward for any demonstration of his enemies.

His first appraisal that matters were not right in front came in the shape of a lurch of the stage, caused by the shying of the four horses. Wheeling to the front again, he observed the figure in the act of raising his gun.

The man was still in the middle of the road, the horses having shied enough to allow them to pass around him. The reports of the weapons down the highway could not have failed to tell this rogue that all had not gone smoothly, while the sight of the stage, bouncing behind the running horses, left

no doubt that the hold-up had not been wholly a success.

Zach knew he would receive a shot or two, and, raising his Winchester, he opened fire simultaneously with his assailant. The latter held his ground, though he could have easily dodged aside in the shelter of the rocks, where he would have been invisible, without lessening his own ability to do effective work. He scorned, however, to retreat, and remained like a statue, while he delivered his fire in as rapid succession as possible.

It was singular that this miscreant forgot at that moment that Zach Emmons was not the only party concerned in this business. He should have recalled the probability of there being one or more passengers. The first reminder of his oversight came in the shape of a flash almost in his face. Then he concluded it was a good time for disappearing, and he skulked to cover, limping so painfully that fortunately there could be no doubt that he had paid the partial penalty, at least, of his wickedness.

"I don't know how bad he's been barked," said Zach Emmons to himself, "but I know I've been nipped pretty hard myself; that left arm will never be of much account again, but I can drive the horses

with one hand as well as with two. I won't let the folks inside learn anything about it, and I guess I'm good to take 'em through to-night."

The driver was hurt worse than he suspected, but, as Buck Bragg had declared, he was game, and he kept the fact to himself. When Buck called out to him that neither himself nor the lieutenant had been so much as scratched, and inquired how he had made out, he replied that he believed he had a little skin taken off, but nothing worth talking about.

The coach soon began descending a slight incline, which lasted for an eighth of a mile. Like all such roads, it was rough, and when one of the wheels struck a stone it sent the vehicle up in the air with such a jolt that the passengers found it difficult to make themselves heard without shouting their words.

Dick leaned out of the side of the stage and looked forward. The four horses were on a gallop, but they were in the middle of the road, and keeping well together. The young officer watched them a minute or two, and then sank back into his seat.

The speed of the coach was too rapid to be comfortable. Both passengers supposed, as a matter of

course, that when the bottom of the incline was reached and the start was made up the moderate ascent beyond, that they would be brought down to a halt and a breathing spell given them.

"We're close to the worst part of the road," shouted Buck, "and Zach has got to draw 'em in, or we'll all go off the rocks!"

To the astonishment of both, however, the speed continued unabated, the horses galloping as furiously as before.

"There's something wrong," exclaimed the lieutenant, rising from his seat and peering ahead again; "the horses are beyond control."

"It's all up, then, with Zach," added Buck, in alarm; "he must be badly hurt or killed, and has rolled off his seat."

"I'll soon learn!" said Dick, who began climbing out of the side of the vehicle to the top.

It was easy for him to reach an elevation which allowed him to see everything on the roof of the coach. There was the treasure-box, the blanket, and rifle, but Zach Emmons was missing!

It was a striking evidence, however, of his conscientious skill, that the lines were fastened in place at the side of the footboard, as though the

driver had put everything in order before taking his final departure.

"I don't know whether I can bring these animals to a halt," muttered Lieutenant Whitcomb, reaching down, unwinding the lines, and then applying all his strength to check the galloping steeds.

At the same time he pressed his foot with might and main against the brake lever. But no perceptible effect was produced. The horses acted as if they were panic-stricken, and continued running as fiercely as before, the rasping brake producing no effect.

"You'd better jump!" called Buck Bragg, making ready to do the same; "we're within a hundred yards of the gorge."

"*No, sir!*" called back Dick, using all his power to bring the teams to a halt; "I'm going to stop them or go over with them!"

The next minute Buck sprang from the coach, shouting to Dick to lose not an instant in doing the same; but the lieutenant's blood was up, and he grimly held on, even though he saw that the horses and stage were doomed.

CHAPTER V.

OVER THE PRECIPICE.

DICK WHITCOMB was one of the finest horsemen that ever graduated from West Point; but when he undertook to manage four galloping steeds, with a heavy coach bounding along behind them, he essayed a task beyond his power and skill.

Fortunately there was enough light from the moon just then to permit him to see more clearly than usual. The ascent up which the four horses were plunging was gradual, but a short distance ahead the road was around a ledge of rocks, where the width was no more than half a dozen yards. The turn was a very short one, and, unless the speed was quite moderate, a carriage was sure to be carried over the rocks by its own momentum.

The lieutenant had no means of knowing the depth of the gorge which yawned on his left, but he could well believe Buck's declaration that it was hundreds of feet. A fall to the bottom was enough

to drive the breath of life from any creature that ever lived.

He observed a considerable abatement of speed as he approached the spot, and, just before reaching it, both of the leaders dropped from a gallop to a trot, the steeds behind them doing the same only a moment later.

This was encouraging ; but, as has been said, the margin was too slight for the full results to be secured. The lieutenant did not realize the extent of the peril, and hoped that the speed of the vehicle had already been reduced to such an extent that it would swing around the terrible place without going over.

The thought of the triumph over the veteran, Buck Bragg, who had leaped from his seat, spurred Dick to hold on, despite the fierce shouts of the rancher for him to leap to the ground and save himself from instant death.

The face of the moon remained free of clouds for several minutes—long enough to bring the end of the most thrilling adventure that young Whitcomb had as yet experienced. He saw the leaders, without any direction from him, curve around the mass of rocks, closely followed by the other

span, and then came the stage. The animals having control of their own movements, were able to make the short turn necessary to save them, but the case was far different with the cumbersome stage. The swing of the steeds was so short that, although the vehicle did not turn over, it slipped sideways toward the cliff, and two wheels went over.

If there ever was a time for leaping, it was at that second, and none could have known it better than Lieutenant Whitcomb. But he was still hopeful that the four horses would be able to drag back the stage from its appalling position, and possibly they might have done so, had it gone no further, and had the fastenings proved sufficiently strong.

But the result was disastrous in both respects. The vehicle lurched still further, and, at the moment the four steeds began struggling to prevent themselves from following, the wagon tongue snapped off like a pipe stem, the traces broke as though they were yarn, while the released animals struck up the highway at a more furious gate than before.

“The confounded fool!” muttered Buck Bragg,

near enough to observe the whole thing; "it serves him right for not jumping as I did. For all that, I'm sorry for him, for he was a likely fellow, and it's worse than being shot by Apaches or Navajos."

As has been said, no creature could survive such a tumble as the stage took down the gorge. It was fully three hundred feet to the bottom, which was composed of solid rock, against which a cannon ball would have been shattered from the concussion.

But the descent was not sheer perpendicular. There were projecting rocks, stunted pines, and bits of bushes, none of them sufficient to check the headlong flight of a such a body as a stage coach, but enough to give an active person a chance for life.

In that frightful moment, when the lieutenant saw that the stage was certain to go over, he did what he ought to have done before, and sprang from the seat toward the level ground above. Despite his peril, he was as cool of head as when sitting in the vehicle talking with his friend. He knew better than to jump to the right, for that would have been certain to bring the heavy body

upon him before reaching the bottom of the gorge.

He leaped the other way. Concentrating all the strength of which he was master, he strove desperately to make the road, but he did not come within ten feet of it. His wild clutching failed to grasp anything, and he started on the fearful descent after the stage, and only a few feet behind it.

The carriage collided with a projecting rock in its path. A prodigious gash was hewn into its side, and its speed was retarded for the moment, when it went on with a more terrific rate than before.

The momentary pause gave Dick time to make another effort for himself. His hands struck something which he knew from the sensation was a bush. He griped with might and main, and with a thrill of hope found that his downward progress was checked.

Holding fast with both hands to the slender bush, he could hear the stage as it crashed and splintered and bounded, going lower, lower and lower, the horrid grinding, shattering noise growing fainter and fainter, until, in the condition of his tense nerves, it seemed that the seconds were

minutes and the depth of the gorge was like that of the bottomless pit itself.

Suddenly there was one grand, reverberating crash, like that of a building falling into ruins, and he knew that the stage had reached its last station. and was lying far down that precipice at the bottom of the gorge, battered into kindling wood.

Dick shuddered at the thought of his narrow escape from such a fate. How keenly he regretted his refusal to follow the advice of Buck Bragg, for he was still encompassed by peril of the most terrifying nature. The bushes to which he was clinging projected from a crevice between two immense boulders. The opening was nearly horizontal, the upper stone being no more than two feet in height, while the lower reached indefinitely downward. Its face was just rough enough to afford the slightest support for his feet, though the projections were so slight that the bush which he had grasped had to bear more than half his weight.

Convinced, however, that with care he could sustain himself indefinitely, he plucked up courage, and held on like a young hero.

It was not long before he caught the voice of

his friend, Buck Bragg, who, with little hope of finding him alive, called his name. A few minutes sufficed for mutual explanations, when the rancher urged Dick to have patience and to hold fast, while he hurried away to the station, four or five miles distant, for a rope with which to draw him from the gorge. He promised to ride one of the horses, and by making all haste, hoped to be back at the end of an hour. Calling good-bye to his young friend, he hurried away.

CHAPTER VI.

BY THE ROADSIDE.

BUCK BRAGG naturally supposed from the words he had exchanged with Lieutenant Whitcomb that the young man was safe on some ledge of rock, where he could wait indefinitely until rescued. But this belief did not cause him to abate any of his energy in bringing help.

It was not quite five miles to the next station, where it was the custom to change teams, and the heat had so abated that Buck did not hesitate to travel rapidly. The horses that had broken loose from the shattered vehicle were somewhere up the road ahead of him. The probabilities were that they would continue their gallop until they reached the station, and the rancher would have to depend on his own limbs to carry him forward.

Having called out his cheery good-bye, he slung his rifle over his shoulder, and struck up the high-

way at a brisk gait, which he meant to continue without intermission to the station.

"I may run against some of them road agents," he reflected, looking sharply about him, "though there isn't much fear from them. One is wiped out certain, another is hit hard, and I don't believe the third got off without a scratch. Poor Zach!" he exclaimed, unconsciously slowing his footsteps, "I forgot him for a minute or two in my anxiety for the youngster. He said he had been scratched by one of the bullets, but he must have been hurt more than he would own. He has rolled off the stage, and couldn't help himself. It's queer we didn't notice it at the time. If he had fallen in front, we would have run over him, and if he had tumbled off the side, we must have seen him. He must have managed to go off the rear. Well," added Buck with a sigh, "we'll be sure to find him when I come back—helloa!"

He halted abruptly at sight of a dark figure dimly seen a short distance in advance. Buck Bragg was not often taken off his guard, and he held his Winchester in such position that no one could get the drop on him.

"It's a horse, but what is the rider doing?" the

rancher asked himself, as he began stealing cautiously forward. "Ah! that's luck!"

To his surprise and delight, the rattle of harness at that moment identified the animal as one of the stage horses. It was nibbling the scant grass at the roadside, where a tiny stream of water trickled down the rocks.

This was the very thing he wished just then above all others. The other animals were not in sight, and had probably continued their flight up the road. The steed raised his head and looked suspiciously at the man while a couple of rods still separated them. As was the custom under such circumstances, Buck uttered a number of soothing expressions, and advanced with the utmost care. But the animal did not like his looks, and before he could reach him, uttered a neigh of alarm and broke into a gallop.

"Plague take you," muttered Buck. "I'll have you yet."

The horse continued his flight for some minutes after vanishing in the gloom, the clomp of his hoofs finally dying out in the distance. Buck broke into a trot, for the increase of speed was so much clear gain to him.

As he anticipated, the outlines of the animal were discerned finally through the gloom in front. He had halted again to crop the grass, which was so sparse that a goat would hardly have noticed it. The favoring light of the moon showed that his head was turned away from the rancher, who stood motionless until the orb was veiled by passing clouds.

The horse had not seen him, and his object was to prevent discovery on the part of the animal until it was too late for him to save himself. Waiting until a glance at the sky showed the obscuration to be greater than it would be at any other time, he walked straight toward the tail of the steed, stepping lightly and going almost on a trot.

Suddenly the horse threw up its head with another neigh, and broke into a gallop, but the man was at his haunch, and at the moment he made the first leap, Buck vaulted upon his back. Once in that position, the most vicious broncho in the whole southwest could not buck him loose.

"Now you can run as fast and long as you want to," said Buck, striking his heels against his

ribs, and uttering a shout which sent the animal forward at the top of his speed.

The harness rattled and the hoofs sent the dirt flying in the air behind him, but the rider showed the beast no mercy. More precious lives than his were at stake, and the haste could not be too great. When the horse showed signs of lagging, the boot heels pounded his sides, and the yell that sounded in his ears would have startled any one within hearing.

A mile further, the other three horses were passed. Two of them were nibbling the vegetation, while the other was pursuing his way homeward at a leisurely rate.

"They haven't heard anything of this at the station," thought Buck, "and they will open their eyes when I tell my story."

Traveling at such a pace, the distance was soon passed, and he uttered another shout when he caught the twinkle of the lights through the darkness.

The station was a low, rambling house, built around an inner court, after the manner of the buildings on the ranches of the southwest. The man, his wife, and his grown up son had made it

their home ever since the stage route was established. It was their duty to look after six horses, keep them in the best possible condition, and have them ready on the arrival of the stage from either direction to take the place of the four that had made the twenty-five miles, and were entitled to feed and rest. In case of necessity they were ready to furnish food and lodging for passengers.

As may be supposed, the arrival of Buck Bragg on the back of one of the stage horses caused a sensation, such as the place had not known since the last hold-up. The rancher quickly told of the startling incidents in which he had borne a part, and impressed upon the man and his son that there was not a minute to spare in going to the help of Zach Emmons and Lieutenant Dick Whitcomb.

The keeper of the station acted promptly. One of the spare horses was fastened to his lightest running wagon, and taking the lines, he started down the highway at a spanking gait, leaving his son and wife to attend to what duties might await them, and to look after the three stray horses that were sure to come in sooner or later.

"The first thing to do," said Buck, after they

had made a goodly distance, "is to hunt up Zach, for he must be in a bad way."

"How about the young man that fell over the rocks?" inquired his companion, who kept the horse at a lively pace.

"He ain't hurt and he'll keep. He can wait there till we're ready to haul him up with this rope, but poor Zach can't be helped too soon."

The decision of Buck was natural, and seemingly the best that could have been made under the circumstances; but could he have known the truth concerning young Dick Whitcomb, he would have pursued a far different course.

When close to the spot where the coach had taken its plunge to destruction, Buck shouted to Dick to have patience and wait awhile, saying they were going to look after Zach, and as soon as he was attended to they would return to the young officer.

His companion had brought the horse to a standstill, and both listened for the reply, which came not.

"I thought I heard him call back 'All right,'" said the keeper, whose imagination must have

formed the sound, for, as was afterward proven, nothing of the kind was uttered.

"That's enough," said Buck, "though I didn't hear it; drive on, for I don't feel right about Zach."

The supposition was that the driver had fallen from the rear of the stage into the middle of the road, where he had probably revived enough to crawl to one side. Consequently, it was necessary to advance with care, scanning the highway on each hand.

The varying light of the moon, and the alternating shadows, rendered this anything but an easy task, for the men felt that it would never do to make a mistake which would be likely to prove fatal to the sufferer, provided he was still alive.

Probably half the distance between the scene of the accident and the hold-up was passed, when the horse pricked up his ears and shied to the left.

"There's something there," whispered the driver, drawing his animal down to a slow walk, and peering intently ahead.

"There he is, sure enough!" added Buck Bragg the next moment, as he distinguished the outlines of a man stretched beside an immense rock on their right.

As he spoke, the rancher vaulted out of the wagon, and, running quickly the few intervening steps, stooped over the prostrate figure.

"Helloa, Zach! how do you feel? Gracious!"

"What's the matter?" called his friend, forcing his horse to step still closer to the prostrate form.

"It isn't Zach!"

"Who can it be?"

At the risk of having his snorting horse dashing off, the driver leaped to the ground and hurried to the side of his friend. Neither could see distinctly, so the driver struck a lucifer, and held it over the upturned face. The breeze that prevailed a short time before had entirely died out, so that it was unnecessary to protect the tiny flame.

Buck Bragg's keen vision had told him the truth. The man was a stranger whom neither had ever seen before.

The manner of his taking off, and his tell-tale appearance even in death (for not a breath of life remained), removed all doubt as to his identity. He was one of the three rash men who had attempted to hold up the stage, and the termination of his career and that of the vehicle must have been almost simultaneous.

The road agents had appeared on the scene without their horses, and this man, in all probability, was the one who stationed himself in advance of the coach. He had been badly hurt, but, since he was so far in advance of the spot where the fusillade took place, he must have been able to travel a considerable distance without help. Realizing at last that he was mortally wounded, he had lain down at the side of the mountain highway and died.

"Well," said Buck, with a sigh, "he had nobody but himself to blame for this. We can't do him any good, and we may as well leave him here."

Unquestionably this was the best thing to do, and the men did not waste their time. Quickly re-entering the light wagon, they resumed their hunt for Zach Emmons, and had gone less than a hundred yards, when the driver exclaimed in a guarded undertone:

"There's another of 'em, or it's Zach himself!"

The second man lay in a position almost precisely like that of the first. An audible groan left no doubt that, badly hurt as he might be, he was yet alive.

The two men were at his side the next instant.

"It's Zach!" said Buck. "Where's that whisky?"

The other produced a flask, while the rancher tenderly raised the head, and the fiery stuff was held at the lips. The stage driver speedily rallied, and with something of his grim humor asked:

“Whose whisky is that? I know it ain’t yours, Buck, for you never carried such good stuff.”

“You’re right,” replied Buck, pleased beyond measure to find the brave fellow himself; “but what’s your idea of making a bed alongside the road? Wouldn’t you prefer one at the station?”

“I don’t know but what I would, I s’pose you’ve brought that victoria for my benefit; but what about the stage?”

“The stage ain’t of much account any more,” replied the keeper of the station, sharing in the good-humor of the others; “but wait till we get you fixed, and then you can do all the talking you want to.”

As they gently helped Zach to his feet he explained that he had been struck twice—once in the arm, receiving a painful fracture, and once in the side. It was the latter wound that was dangerous. From some cause the pain overcame him at the very moment when he was confident of mastering his suffering.

Discovering that he was going to faint, he quickly wrapped the reins around the iron hook at the corner of the footboard, and threw himself back behind the treasure box.

He was still confident that, by taking a prone position, he would soon master his weakness, and that it was not necessary to check the horses. Finding, however, his senses leaving him, he called to his friends in the coach below, but his voice was so weak that they did not hear it, and everything quickly became chaos.

While lolling helplessly about on the top of the coach, a lurch must have thrown him to the ground at the rear. The shock caused him partially to revive, and he crawled to the side of the highway, where unconsciousness again overtook him. While lying thus, the road agent must have passed him, lying down a short distance beyond to breathe out his life.

Zach's position was made as easy as possible in the vehicle, and the return took place on a slow walk. The driver, as may be supposed, was profoundly interested in the story that Buck had to tell him of the fate of the stage coach, after he parted company with it. He had nothing but

praise for the young lieutenant, and was delighted to learn that no harm had befallen him.

When the wagon reached the scene of the accident, it was arranged that Buck should leave it, while the keeper drove on with his wounded friend to the station. Zach needed the best of care and nursing, and every hour's delay was against him. Besides, it was necessary that steps should be taken to recover the wealth that lay at the bottom of the gorge.

Buck, therefore, with his long coil of rope, parted company with his friends, who drove on at a moderate pace. Making sure of the right spot, which was easily located, he leaned over the gorge and shouted:

"Helloa, lieutenant! are you tired of waiting?"

A pang of misgiving came to Buck when he repeated this call without receiving the slightest response.

His first supposition was, that Dick was sulking at being left so long; but when the repeated calls brought back no response, he knew that something serious must have taken place.

Buck had a powerful voice, and he used it for all it was worth, calling upon his young friend

repeatedly, but the stillness gave back no token. The straining ear could not catch the slightest whisper in the way of a reply.

What could have happened?

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GORGE.

LIEUTENANT DICK WHITCOMB'S position, as he clung to the rocks some fifty feet down the gorge, was much less pleasant than Buck Bragg supposed. While he felt able to sustain himself for a considerable while, he was desirous of improving his situation by clambering to a ledge a short distance above. The only means of doing this was by drawing himself upward by a small clump of bushes, which he grasped with both hands. His misgiving as to the strength of this support was the cause of his hesitation for some minutes after the departure of Buck Bragg for the station nearly five miles up the road.

The fact that the clump had already withstood a strain considerably greater than his entire weight, convinced him that the risk was not too great. Reaching one hand down, he assured himself that his revolver was in place at his hip, and his clothes

did not seem to have suffered to any extent from the rough usage their owner had received.

For one so light and well trained as himself, it was an easy task to raise himself the short distance, and he speedily found his face on a level with the ledge he was anxious to reach. All would have been well, but at this critical juncture he was startled almost out of his senses by the fierce whirr of a rattlesnake coiled at the root of the bushes.

It is hardly possible to conceive the shock caused by this unexpected warning. The thought of peril from that source had never entered the mind of the youth, though he knew that Arizona abounds with dangerous rattlers. He felt, with the majority of mankind, an abhorrence of all species of serpents, and would rather meet a grizzly bear at any time than come in contact with the loathsome reptiles.

The whirring rattle showed that the snake was almost against his hand, and was certain to strike within the next second. Dick took no time to consider, but involuntarily let go of the bushes and dropped toward the bottom of the gorge.

But the good fortune which had followed him so long did not desert him now. The descent, as has been explained, was not perpendicular, but steeply

shelving. He shot rapidly down the rough face of the rock for an unknown distance, and then stopped so abruptly that he lay for a minute partly stunned.

But he was young and strong, and quickly rallied. He found he had alighted on a ledge, varying from two to five feet in width, covered also with bushes and grass. It was these that had broken his fall and saved him from injury.

The gorge down which he had taken this abrupt tumble was no more than a hundred feet wide at its broadest part; and, since the moon was not directly overhead, Dick found himself in such shadow that it was hard for him to decide precisely where he was. As nearly as he could judge, however, he had descended nearly one half the way to the bottom of the prodigious ravine. The ledge on which he stood sloped downward along the face of the rocks so regularly that he was hopeful that the bottom of the gorge could be reached by that means.

“I’ll try it, anyway,” he muttered, beginning to pick his way down the incline; “and all I ask is, that I don’t step on any of those rattlers—*oogh!*”

A slight noise in front caused him to leap back-

ward to avoid the sting of one of the venomous reptiles; but it was only a fragment of dirt or stone that was displaced. But he could not shut out his thoughts of the rattlers, from one of which he had just had such a narrow escape.

The suspicion that the sloping ledge continued to the bottom of the gorge proved correct. Dick moved carefully forward until, before he expected, he found he had reached the lowermost depth.

"I took a longer time than the stage," he said to himself, "but I think it paid me. *Helloa!*"

His foot caught in some obstruction, and he tripped. It was too dark to see distinctly, but the suspicion that it was a part of the ill-fated vehicle caused him to strike a match and look around.

As he held the tiny twist of flame above his head, he saw that, despite the turning of the ladder by which he had descended, he was in the midst of the ruins of the stage-coach, whose dissolution was so absolute that it resembled the fate of the "one hoss shay," made forever famous by the poet.

"I recall that Buck told me there was a treasure box on the top, and there it is, sure enough!"

Those receptacles for gold and bills were made as strong as strong could be, and were capable of

standing a good deal of battering ; but that fearful descent of three hundred feet down the gorge in company with the destroyed stage had been too much for this particular one. It had split apart as if it were a watermelon, and the little canvas bags lay strewn around like leaves in autumn.

“There’s a fortune for some one if it was but known,” said Dick, as he allowed his match to flicker out ; “but Buck will bring help to the spot as soon as he looks after Zach.”

The lieutenant now naturally asked himself the question whether it was not possible to find his way out of the gorge. He had reached the bottom without help, with no hurt worth mentioning, and it would seem that some path ought to lead to the level ground above. At any rate, he decided to make search, for there was no telling when Buck would be back, and action, even if unattended with any result, was preferable to staying idle in one spot.

Naturally, the youth took a course up the gorge, that is, toward the station whence Buck Bragg had gone for help.

The task was anything but an easy one. He was obliged to climb over boulders and move

around high and steep rocks, and more than once he was brought to a standstill, under the fear that progress was at an end; but, after drawing upon his supply of matches, he was able to discover some way to advance further, with the probability that he would soon be checked as before.

As nearly as he could judge he had traveled a quarter of a mile in this uncertain fashion, when he received a shock of genuine surprise by the sight of a light ahead. It broke upon him like the sudden unveiling of a bright star or the lighting of a lantern, and seemed to be only one or two hundred yards away.

It was a queer fancy that entered his head, and yet the suspicion was not unreasonable that he was near a party of Indians. The Apaches, besides being the most venomous red men that ever lived, capable of performing more marvelous feats than any other people, had a way, not peculiar to them, of riding whither they chose without asking permission of any one. San Carlos reservation was at no great distance, and from what Dick had learned from his companion, he knew that Geronimo and his followers were in the habit of riding over the country to the north, south, east, or west, as fancy

dictated. What more natural, therefore, than that a party were in this gorge for some purpose of their own?

This was the question the lieutenant asked himself, as he carefully picked his way up the gorge. He reflected that if the party should prove to be Apaches, his mode of introduction to them was likely to be far different from what he anticipated.

The instruction at West Point does not include lessons on the best methods of fighting Indians, but Lieutenant Dick Whitcomb knew as much of the subject as one of his age and advantages could be expected to know. It was not impossible that the party which he was approaching was made up of friendly Indians, but it was prudent to take nothing for granted at such a time.

The young officer, therefore, used every possible precaution in stealing over the short distance he had to travel. Several times he narrowly escaped falling, or knocking loose some stone that would have been sure to alarm any one on the watch.

He met his reward, however, without mishap. He was yet some way from the camp fire, when he

was able to see clearly the figures that were moving back and forth in front of it.

They were Indians, beyond question. Several of them were revealed as plainly as if by sunlight, and there was no mistaking the coarse coppery features, the long, straggling black hair, the half civilized costume, and the general make up of that migratory race.

Though Dick had never seen an Apache, he was convinced that these belonged to that tribe, and his heart gave a little quicker throb than usual when he reflected that possibly the redoubtable Geronimo himself was among the group.

However, it could make little difference to the youth whether such was the case or not, and he stood debating with himself whether it was possible for him to get by the party without discovery. The gorge was so narrow that this must necessarily prove a difficult if not impossible undertaking; but there seemed nothing else to do, and he had made up his mind to try it, when he was startled by a slight noise directly behind him. He had not dreamed of danger from *that* direction, but it was there.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNWELCOME CALLER.

IT was at this critical juncture that Lieutenant Whitcomb heard Buck Bragg calling to him from the top of the precipice a considerable distance away.

It would have required very loud shouting on the part of the young officer to reply, and it need not be said that he made no attempt to do so. His own safety demanded that he should hold his peace.

His first thought, when he heard the slight noise behind him, was that one of the Apaches was returning along the gorge and was passing near him. Without moving from the spot, he stooped down until the bowlders on all sides shut him out of sight of any one not within touching distance.

The character of the sound which had alarmed the youth convinced him that the warrior did not suspect his proximity, since there was no effort on his part to avoid betraying himself; but a moment's

listening apprised him that instead of being a man it was a wild animal. Hardly was this discovery made when he identified the creature as a grizzly bear. The sniff and grunt and the heavy, lurching tread, which he could recognize by means of his ear, left no doubt of the nature of the animal.

"I wonder whether he's after *me*," was the natural query of Dick, as he reflected that he was not in the best shape to meet such a savage brute, since the only weapon he possessed was his five chambered revolver. With a start, too, he recalled that it was unloaded. While waiting in his perilous situation he softly recharged each chamber—a duty which he ought to have performed before.

"Old Ephraim" is undoubtedly the most dangerous enemy encountered by the hunters in the wild West, but instances are not lacking when he has shown cowardice, fleeing before the popping of a single pistol; but such instances are rare, and as a rule it is fatal for a single man to attack him, even though well armed, unless he possesses unusual skill and coolness.

Dick decided on his course with his usual promptness. If the grizzly should root him out, he would give him the contents of the five cham-

bers in quick succession, and then make a rush to the camp fire of the Apaches, appealing to them for protection against the monster.

True, he would incur no little risk in taking this step, but not so much as by making a fight with the beast; for defeat at the hands of the latter was certain, while a sudden dash among the warriors would save him from the animal. There was a chance that the Apaches were friendly, or at least indifferent. If hostile, they would find their attention so fully taken up with the brute that perhaps Dick would have a chance of giving them the slip, should the outlook prove unfavorable.

The action of the grizzly indicated that he suspected the presence of his supper near by, though he was unable precisely to locate it. Instead of moving down the gorge, he snuffed about, clambered over some of the rocks, and, as if in the mere wantonness of his massive strength, rolled others aside from his path.

All this time he was not more than a dozen feet from the crouching boy, who was on the point, time and again, of making a break for the camp fire without waiting to give the animal a fusillade; but, if the beast would depart without molesting

him, it would be far preferable to an appeal to the Apaches.

It is hard to appreciate the peculiar peril of the lieutenant. He knew the bear was near him, but was uncertain whether the brute was aware of the whereabouts of the young man capable of furnishing such a choice meal. What he dreaded was that the mountainous beast might lurch over upon him like an avalanche, before he could dart aside. The varying light of the moon rendered this not impossible, for it so happened that moments came when in his crouching posture he could not see more than a few feet from him.

Uncertain, therefore, of the precise location of the brute, Dick hesitated to move lest he should precipitate the fatal calamity. He felt around in search of some opening through which he might dart without rising to his feet, but could find nothing of the kind.

A most peculiar experience now came to the lieutenant. He was at the very bottom of the natural inclosure, only six feet or so in diameter, in which he had taken refuge, when the bear put in an appearance.

At the very moment that the moon emerged

from behind the clouds that had been veiling its face for some time, the head and shoulders of an enormous grizzly loomed to view over the rocks and directly above him. Against the moonlit sky beyond, the massive front looked as if stamped in ink, the outlines so clear that there could be no mistaking the animal.

The beast had evidently scented something, but a doubt of its nature led him to halt on the edge of the inclosure, while he thrust his snout slightly forward in the effort to learn what it was. All was blank darkness in the shallow well, so that the grizzly could see nothing, and, since the uncertainty of the nature of the danger is the terrifying element to a wild animal, the beast waited for the object, whatever it might be, to identify itself.

The lieutenant held his revolver tightly clasped in his right hand, but, suspecting the cause of the bear's hesitation, he hardly breathed. Should the grizzly decide to make his onslaught upon the youth, the situation of the latter could not have been worse. All that he could rely upon was that his rapid firing upon the beast would demoralize him for a few seconds, during which he could

scramble out of the cave and get a start for the camp fire.

The pistol was leveled at the front of the giant foe, and more than once his finger pressed the trigger almost hard enough to discharge the weapon, but the youth hesitated, afraid to open the struggle so long as there was a possibility of avoiding it.

This extraordinary situation was too strained to continue long. Since the eyesight of the animal could not tell him the truth, it is more than likely he would have speedily made the deciding investigation himself; for it is not to be supposed that such a mighty monarch of the solitudes knew much of real fear, even though a somewhat similar sensation had caused him to hesitate for a brief while.

The head of the bear being lowered, there was a peculiar humping of his vast shoulders, making an irregular outline as they were thrown in relief against the sky, the huge head being mostly invisible, because of the intervening shoulders.

Dick was scanning this odd picture closely and on the eve of firing, when one of the shoulders dropped several inches lower than the other. This was because the weight of the front was thrown on

the latter, in order that he might reach a paw down and find out what it really was that baffled his curiosity.

Fortunately the extended paw did not touch the shrinking lad, and before the latter could make sure of sending his bullets into the skull of the brute, an unlooked for interference took place.

The Apaches, by some means or other, had discovered the presence of the bear. Since they were the savages who defied the whole United States army, they were not the ones to flee from a grizzly bear, though none understood its ferocity better. Two of the warriors, seizing brands, ran quickly out from the camp, and, while the animal hesitated over the inclosure containing the lieutenant, they made for him with shouts and yells. The startled animal looked around, just in time to receive one of the torches full in the face.

No creature can withstand such an attack. With a snuff of fear the vast front swung around like the bow of a ship, and he made off at a lumbering gait, quickly leaving the young officer to himself.

No more providential escape could have occurred, and all would have been well but for the singular part which the friendly torch played in the business.

CHAPTER IX.

GERONIMO.

THE torch thrown by the Apache, after striking the snout of the grizzly, dropped into the inclosure where Lieutenant Whitcomb was kneeling and on the very point of opening fire on the animal. Without stopping to think of the risk of the act, Dick seized the flaming brand and flung it after the retreating beast. The warriors could not fail to notice the strange occurrence, and must have suspected the cause, but for the moment they were so occupied with the huge game that they gave no attention to it.

The torch, however, had hardly left the hand of the youth, when he realized the mistake he had made. Without hesitation he scrambled from the peculiar refuge and hastened from the spot.

In the flurry of the moment, he did not forget that his true course was to pass by the camp fire, with a view of finding the way out of the gorge into which he had followed the ruined stage.

The advent of the bear naturally caught the attention of the Apaches, who numbered only eight. They were darting hither and thither, several carrying torches and all guns, eager to bring down the great game, which, if somewhat bewildered by the strange assault, was not much frightened. He did not like the flaming missiles, which flashed in front of him wherever he turned, but their very number gave him a familiarity which lessened the dread of that particular terror; and, when he found a howling savage directly in his path, whirling one of them rapidly about his head, he made straight for him, instead of retreating, as the assailant expected.

The latter flung his torch at the brute, and instead of flying, brought his gun to a quick level and discharged it, with the muzzle almost against the frightful front.

It was impossible that he should miss, but the shot only served to render the beast more furious, and, ere the nimble Indian could dodge him, he was caught in the resistless grip of the ponderous arms of the grizzly.

At the moment Dick Whitcomb emerged so hastily from the pit in which he had taken refuge,

he saw his discovery by the Apaches was inevitable. The torches that were gleaming in every direction, added to the moonlight which was again at its best, made everything so plain that he must have been noticed before he got twenty paces from the spot.

Under such circumstances, he took the wisest course by making a virtue of necessity. He added his shouting and hurrahs to those of the Apaches, and it is safe to say that not one of them raised a greater hullabaloo than he. He acted as though he considered himself a member of the hunting party, whose sole object was to bring down the monster that had dared to approach the camp.

The lieutenant rushed toward the bear at the moment the latter seized the Apache who was not nimble enough to elude him. The opportunity was a golden one to pay the part of the brave rescuer, or rather to play the part of one attempting it, for the little popgun in Dick's hand could not be expected to do much service in the fight.

But, still shouting and enthusiastic, Dick did not hesitate, and running close to the bear, he opened on him with the revolver, sending shot after shot

into the bulky carcass until four of the chambers were empty.

Every bullet found its mark, adding to the fury of the brute, and as a consequence increasing the peril of the warrior caught in his terrific grip. Had the latter been an ordinary individual, with little experience in that sort of amusement, nothing could have saved him; for, though his friends instantly rallied to his help, the bear wanted but a minute or two in which to complete his work, and that brief period was sure to be at his command, even though every one of the other warriors discharged his gun into his body.

But the Apache caught so foul was like all his brothers, in that he possessed remarkable strength, activity and a coolness of resource that nothing could destroy.

The blow which the bear aimed at him was dodged, but, as has been shown, he was seized before he could get beyond reach. By this time the Indian had dropped his useless rifle and whipped out a knife. This was plunged to the hilt in the vast body at the moment when the beam-like arms drew the savage to the hairy chest of his foe. Before the brute could complete his work, Lieutenant

Whitcomb opened the bombardment, and several other Apaches crowded around the combatants, firing, yelling and striking with their knives.

Such a wholesale attack could not fail to bewilder the bear to some extent, especially as one of the shots injured his eyesight. This momentary bewilderment was enough to cause a slight relaxation of the grip—the very thing for which the half-crushed warrior was waiting, and of which he took instant advantage, by slipping away as though his entire body was oiled.

As a consequence, the bear embraced vacancy only, and a minute later he was so riddled by rifle balls that he sank in a heap, and breathed his last with hardly a struggle. The toughest animal that lives could not have withstood such an assault as he underwent in the space of a single minute.

“Hurrah!” shouted Dick, flinging his cap in the air, and apparently the most delighted of the crowd; “We fetched him that time.”

The interest of the party was turned upon the handsome young fellow in uniform, whose appearance on the scene was more of a surprise than that of the grizzly bear, for the latter was to be looked for at any time, while it is fair to presume that young

Whitcomb was the first United States officer that had ever ventured into that wild gorge.

There was something amusing in the ardor displayed by Dick Whitcomb in his new character of a friend of the fierce Apaches. He ran to the warrior who had escaped so cleverly from the grasp of the beast and placing his hand on his shoulder, asked :

“Are you hurt, my friend?”

The Indian clearly was astonished, and made some reply, but as it was in his own tongue, the youth did not comprehend it. Most of the torches had expired, though several were spluttering on the ground, and objects were seen only indistinctly.

But the two Apaches that had kept their place near the camp fire had thrown on more wood and stirred the blaze, so that the circle of light extended to the figures that had been so busy but a minute before. A general movement toward camp followed, and a few steps only were necessary to bring all into as bright a glare as noonday itself.

While the lieutenant became such an object of curiosity, it need not be said that he made the best possible use of his eyes. He had already noted

that the party numbered eight, and it was easy for him to fix upon the leader.

He was one of the two that had not left the camp fire during the flurry, caused by the appearance of the grizzly bear.

He was a heavy set man in middle life, his long, wiry black hair straggling about his shoulders, with a broad mouth, teeth stained by tobacco smoke, twinkling bead-like eyes, square massive jaws, and a villainous expression, in which it would have been hard to find a trace of kindness or magnanimity.

All the Indians were dressed in much the same way, the costume being what might be described as half civilized, with soiled blankets, breech clouts, leggings and mocassins. Each carried a fine rifle and knife, and some of them had feathers stuck in their hair, the ornaments, like the hair itself, being stained a variety of colors.

Confident of the identity of the leader, Lieutenant Whitcomb made a military salute as he stood erect before him. He saw something like a smile light up the forbidding countenance of the chief, who, without replying to the salutation turned to the

warrior standing near him and said something in a low voice.

The second person was an interpreter, and the leader must have told him to address the white person, for, to the astonishment of the latter, the second Apache, with the others watching the scene, spoke good English.

“Who be you?”

“Lieutenant Richard Whitcomb, of company G, Sixth United States Cavalry, stationed at Fort Grant.”

The interpreter translated this reply to the chieftain who gave him other commands in his own tongue, for the examination was immediately resumed.

“Where come from?”

“I was on my way to Fort Grant when I fell from the road over the rocks. I was making my way up the gorge, and saw the light of your camp, just before the bear attacked me.”

It struck the lieutenant at this moment that unless very circumspect, he would betray the presence of the thousands of dollars in gold lying not far away in the gorge. If the Apaches should learn the truth, they would be quick to seize the plunder,

for no white man could understand better than they the worth of the yellow stuff for which hundreds are always eager to risk their lives.

He had a difficult task to tell a plausible story without revealing the important truth.

“How fall ober rocks?” continued his questioner. Dick suspecting from his manner that he discredited the story.

Now if he wished to keep his all important secret, it was unsafe to say that the stage had taken that fatal plunge—that no passengers were injured, and that he saved himself by catching fast to a projecting rock and making his way to the bottom of the gorge. Though it was strictly true, the statement itself was such an improbable one that many of his own race would discredit it.

Since the scene of the hold-up was not very distant, it would seem also that the Apaches ought to have heard the reports of the guns, and understood what was going on. One of the cardinal principles of the West Pointer is to tell the truth at all times; but it is a principle of war also to use your utmost skill to deceive the enemy as to your intentions.

All these thoughts passed through the mind of

Lieutenant Whitcomb before he made reply to the last question. Every eye of the group was fixed on him, and he knew his face was flushed like that of one who is trying to deceive.

"The stage slipped off the rocks and went over before it could be stopped."

"How many folks killed?"

"None ; there was only one other passenger beside myself, and he jumped in time to save himself."

"Where driver?"

"He left the stage in time to save himself from going over the rocks. I managed to catch hold of some bushes before I had gone far, and held myself for a while. I got down to the bottom after a time without injury, and was trying to find my way out, when I came upon the camp fire."

At this point Dick decided to ask a question for his own information. Pointing at the one whom he had fixed upon as the chief, he said :

"May I know the name of the great leader?"

The interpreter, instead of answering the query, made it known to the other, who nodded his head once or twice, and then, facing the youth, said, with flashing eyes :

"Me Geronimo—me Geronimo !"

CHAPTER X.

OUT OF THE GORGE.

LIEUTENANT WHITCOMB was not surprised to learn that he was standing in the presence of one of the mightiest scoundrels since the time of Victorio and the old leaders of the Apaches, for the suspicion that the savage in front of him was the redoubtable Geronimo had been growing upon him from the moment he first saw him.

The young officer gracefully raised his cap and saluted the chieftain, who could not have failed to understand the courtesy intended, though his coppery countenance still refused any evidence of his emotions.

Much to Dick's relief, his questioner did not follow his examination any further respecting the stage coach. Had he done so, he must have gained all the truth, and the Apaches would not have failed to hasten to the place to secure the plunder. The questions now took a new direction.

"When you must be at Fort Grant?" asked the interpreter, who showed a surprising knowledge of English.

"I must be there day after to-morrow—that is the time that has been named by the officers above me."

"Won't be dere den."

"Why not?"

"Geronimo won't let you."

"Well," was the cool response of the lieutenant, "that will be a good excuse, which they will have to accept. How long do you mean to keep me from the fort?"

The interpreter turned to Geronimo, and the two talked several minutes in low tones. Some of their words were in mongrel Spanish, of which Dick could catch the meaning, though not sufficiently to get the run of what was said. There could be no doubt that the brief conversation referred to him, and he would have given a good deal to understand it, but that was out of the question.

But Lieutenant Whitcomb was not left long to speculate on what the intentions of his captors were. The interpreter said:

"We go away—you go wid us."

The young officer nodded his head, but said nothing more, and the whole party, as if by one impulse, moved from the camp fire. Dick supposed that a long tramp was before him, and he was wondering whither it would lead, when, to his astonishment, he found himself among a number of horses picketed near.

To his surprise, he was placed on the pony of the interpreter, the latter riding like the rest without any saddle, the back of the horse being partly covered with a blanket. Lieutenant Dick bestrode this animal behind the Apache, who took his place at the front beside Geronimo.

The lieutenant took some comfort from the fact that no indignity had yet been offered him. He had been allowed to keep his revolver; but, inasmuch as there was only a single charge left in it, it was not likely to prove a formidable weapon in his hand. Still, as all knew he had it, it was singular they did not claim the weapon.

The moon still shed a faint light through the gorge, and the wonder of Dick was that the ponies were able to make their way with so little trouble over the rugged ground. Boulders, rocks and bushes were encountered continually, but the

animals advanced on their winding course with such freedom that it was evident they were following some well beaten trail.

"There must be an end to this gorge," was the thought of the captive, "and sooner or later we shall reach higher ground."

The thought was hardly formed, when he observed that they were ascending a path which extended along the side, and he was quite certain they were making their way toward the top of the valley into which he had made such a memorable descent.

For some distance the trail was broad enough to allow the Apaches to ride in couples ; but, before half the ascent was completed, it narrowed to that extent that they were obliged to adopt the old system of riding in Indian file. Geronimo checked his horse and fell behind the interpreter, who took the lead. This placed the rest of the warriors to the rear of Dick, and nothing would be easier than for any one of them to pick him off on the slightest attempt to give his captors the slip.

There were places where the path was no more than two feet wide. On the left was the precipitous side of the gorge, still reaching far above them, while to the right the declivity extended almost

perpendicularly downward to a dizzying depth. A single misstep of the pony, and he and his riders would be precipitated to as certain destruction as was the old stage coach a couple of hours before.

But the animals were sure footed, and they steadily ascended the sloping path with as much confidence as though walking on the level highway. A shiver passed over the lieutenant as the horse beneath him made a slight stumble, but he instantly recovered himself, without any apparent alarm on the part of his master.

Suddenly the leading pony arrived at the level ground above, closely followed by the others. The feat was accomplished so unexpectedly that it was a minute or two before Dick realized what had taken place. Then to his amazement, he observed that they were in the broad highway over which the stage was traveling when it was destroyed.

The point where the road was reached was some distance in advance of the scene of the catastrophe, and within a mile or more of the station from which help had been sent out to Zach Emmons, the injured driver. The leading horseman brought his animal to a halt, and waited for the others to

gather around Geronimo, who evidently had some directions to give before proceeding further.

Whether the intention of the chief was to continue up the road to the station, or whether he meant to strike across it and enter upon some other trail cannot be known, for before a dozen words were exchanged, an alarm took place.

The ponies were the first to scent it. Several of them pricked their ears, snuffed slightly, and, throwing up their heads, looked in the direction of the station. All at once there was a blinding flash, the sharp reports of carbines, the shouts of men, and a party of United States cavalry thundered down the road straight for the Apaches.

Evidently they were a scouting party hunting for this same company of miscreants, and, now that the opportunity offered prepared to smite them hip and thigh.

CHAPTER XI.

WARM WORK.

THE volley of the cavalrymen came like a thunderbolt from a summer sky. An exploding bombshell could not have scattered the Apaches with more precipitation. Knowing like a flash what it meant, they plunged their ponies among the rocks on the other side of the highway, where it seemed difficult for a chamois to find footing, and were off like a whirlwind.

Some of the warriors and more than one horse were struck, but all managed to leave the road with the exception of a single Indian, whose steed was stung by a couple of carbine bullets so sharply that he became unmanageable. Instead of doing as did his fellows, he whirled about like a top and started down the road on a dead run.

This pony was the one bestrode by the interpreter and Dick Whitcomb. Had not both been unusually skillful riders, they would have been

flung from their seats, but it required an extraordinary beast to unseat them.

The lieutenant could not mistake those reports, the wild shouts and the desperate charge down the highway. He knew that friends had come upon the scene, but he was in not only exceedingly bad but in very dangerous company. He was as liable to be struck by the hurtling bullets as were the warriors, and the hurricane style in which the cavalry did their work gave little time for explanations.

The pony had no more than started on his furious flight, when his Apache rider whipped out his knife and attempted to strike the young man behind him. He saw that his horse must keep the road for some distance, and the redskin would have all he could do to attend to his own safety without trying to carry off a prisoner.

Had the lieutenant been seated in front, nothing could have saved him, but, provided he kept his wits about him, he had the advantage from being astride of the pony behind the other and with both arms around his waist.

It was fortunate that in the flurry of the attack Dick instinctively tightened this pressure, as a

person will do when assailed by an unexpected peril. Having drawn his knife, the Apache half turned and struck a venomous blow over his shoulder, which cut the coat of the youth. Before he could repeat it, Dick read his purpose.

“What do you mean, you wretch?” demanded the indignant officer; “I’ve got my pistol, and I will give you a taste of *that*.”

But to draw his weapon he would have to relax his hold around the Apache’s waist. This would give his enemy a fatal advantage, and the youth dared not attempt it, even though the single charge in his revolver would have settled the business.

So long as Dick could hold his enemy squarely in front, so long was he safe, but such a state of affairs could not last long. The pony was on a wild gallop, while a squad of cavalry were pressing them hard, the men shouting and firing their carbines. Though the darkness prevented anything like accurate shooting, the bullets were whistling alarmingly close to the ears of the fugitives. Besides, Dick was serving the disagreeable part of a shield to the Apache, for the ball that reached the Indian must first hit the white man.

The lieutenant hugged his enemy like a bear. He must have seriously interfered with the breathing of the Apache, though he could not entirely shut off his wind. He kept striking backward, sometimes over his shoulder and sometimes under it, and more than once the point of his knife punctured the skin of the officer, who hugged him the more tightly.

Suddenly he withdrew his arms from under those of his foe, and like a flash threw them around his body, so as to clasp the arms of the other in the embrace ; but with inimitable dexterity, the Apache released his left arm, which grasped his rifle, and exchanged the latter weapon for his knife, with which he again began striking with the fierceness and swiftness of a coiled serpent at the young man, who was hanging on like grim death.

This remarkable contest was begun and ended in the space of a single minute. All at once, the lieutenant pressed his knees against the ribs of the pony, and then, by a quick, powerful wrench, hurled the Apache from his horse.

Even then the discomfited warrior displayed an agility that approached the marvelous. Although he went off sideways, and at a moment when he

was expecting nothing of the kind, he did not fall, but like a catamount recovered himself in the air and struck on his feet.

His momentum, however, as he landed from the back of a horse on a dead run compelled him to run several steps before he could steady himself and bring his rifle to his shoulder to shoot the daring youngster from the back of his pony.

But Dick was expecting something of the kind, and had flung himself forward on the neck of his steed, after the manner of the Apaches themselves. Pointing his pistol backward at the figure which was bounding and skurrying forward like a rubber ball, he let fly with the single charge in his revolver.

He hardly expected to hit his man, for the shot was a blind one, and it is probable he missed him by several feet. Confident of what the Apache would do, Dick not only stretched forward but threw himself partly on the opposite shoulder of the pony, whose neck hid his head, and whose body shielded the rest of his person, with the exception of one leg, which was twisted over the spine of the running beast, and was all that prevented the daring rider from going to the ground.

As there was no earthly chance for the Apache to shoot his man, what did the miscreant do, but deliberately kill his own beast!

The bullet which sped from his gun bored almost the entire length of the body of the pony which had carried his master through many a fearful peril, inflicting a hurt that was instantly fatal. With a shrieking whinny, he bounded several feet in air, and plunged forward on his nose, dead.

It must be borne in mind that all this time the squadron of cavalry were whirling down the road like a cyclone, and that, wonderfully fleet as was the Apache, his speed was less than that of a horse when on a full run. Consequently he fell behind his own flying animal, and was rapidly overhauled by his pursuers.

At the moment when his gun flashed out in the gloom, the leading cavalryman was upon him. Leaning forward, he praised his sabre high, and made a downward sweep intended to cleave the skull of the Indian as though it were an apple. There can be no doubt, too, that he would have done it, but for the fact that the skull was not there when the blow descended.

"There he is, Sam!" called out a second horse-

man, who thundered to the spot at that instant; "he has dodged under your horse!"

"Catch him if he comes out on that side!" called a third rider, who checked his galloping steed at the same instant on the other side of Sam.

The scene which followed will scarcely be credited, and it is impossible to describe the particulars.

Three United States cavalymen had come to a sudden halt for the purpose of cutting down a dismounted Apache, who carried his knife in one hand and his rifle in the other. He had escaped the first stroke by whisking under the horse of the soldier, and while in that desperate situation, a second horseman took position on one side and a third on the other. All three were skillful swordsmen, and on the alert to let him have it the instant he could be reached.

Just as he shot under the belly of the first steed, the Apache made a quick flirt with his knife, inflicting a cut on the horse like the violent thrust of a spur. The frenzied animal plunged a dozen feet away.

The act swept the roof, as may be said, from over the hard pressed Indian, and left him exposed

to the attack of the two cavalrymen who stood awaiting just such a chance as this.

“Now we’ve got him!” called one, leaning far out of his saddle and bringing down a lightning-like stroke, too rapid, as it would seem, for the eye to follow it; but all the same the Apache dodged it with a nimbleness which exasperated the soldier, while it compelled a certain admiration of the fellow’s amazing cleverness.

“What’s the matter, Fred?” called the other impatiently; “I don’t believe you could hit an elephant.”

“Suppose you show me how to do it,” replied the other.

“I will! now watch me!”

The Apache was at the shoulder of the speaker’s horse and the cavalryman, taking a lesson from what he had seen in the moonlight, made a quick feint to deceive the warrior, and then with all the skill and quickness he could call into play, he let drive straight at the flying hair of the Indian. whose doom seemed sealed at last.

CHAPTER XII.

THREE CHEERS.

"WELL," muttered the enraged trooper, as his saber whizzed through the air without coming in contact with anything; "I believe he's the evil one himself!"

The Apache seemed scarcely to have stirred, but, all the same, he made a movement, which like that of the skillful boxer was just sufficient to dodge the terrific blow aimed at his skull.

"I hope they'll both miss him," was the thought of the first horseman; "he belongs to *me*."

He speedily checked his pricked charger, and, wheeling him about, approached the dusky figure with great impetuosity, not lacking however in a certain caution from his previous experience brief though it was.

"Stand back, boys!" he called to his companions; "let me have another go at him."

The Apache seemed to be bewildered by the overwhelming onslaught, for he stood still in the

middle of the highway, as if uncertain which way to turn. The second and third horsemen, who were on the point of repeating their assault checked their animals, and allowed their comrade to try his hand once more.

"The poor wretch is bewildered," was the thought of both, "and Sam will have an easy thing of it."

The latter galloped forward, with his saber ready for action, and with his gaze fixed intently on the redskin

"Maybe you're puzzled," thought the charger, "and maybe again you ain't."

The moon, as if interested in the strange struggle, brushed the clouds from before its face and looked down with unobstructed vision.

It was Sam Kirkland, a West Point graduate of two years before, who charged upon the Apache, with the resolve that he should not escape again. The center of all this disturbance seemed as if he was glued to the spot, but Lieutenant Kirkland knew better than to count upon any such favorable turn, and, like one of his comrades, he made a dexterous feint before giving what was meant for the settling blow.



HUCK REPEATED HIS CALL, BUT STILL THERE IS NO ANSWER.

At the instant of doing so, the warrior executed a most amazing leap, that carried him to the side of the road, where he vanished among the rocks like a figure in a pantomine.

"He deserves his freedom," said Kirkland, who could bear his chagrin the better because it was shared by both his companions. "If all the Apaches dodge like that, a dozen of them can keep our whole army on the jump till they die of old age."

"There's another of them," added one of the troopers, as the outlines of a horseman came to view down the road; "let us see how well *he* can do on his pony."

The cavalymen drew themselves up ready to charge the foe, when, to their astonishment, he hailed them.

"Helloa there! Give me the countersign and I'll advance.

"Come on, whoever you are!" called back Kirkland.

And Dick Whitcomb, smiling at the surprise he knew he had caused, rode forward, and, as he came into view in the moonlight, saluted the three troopers, who scrutinized him with profound curiosity.

They could see that he wore the uniform of a lieutenant of cavalry, and it need not be said that he received a cordial welcome.

"Isn't this Dick Whitcomb of Company G, Sixth Cavalry, under orders to report at Fort Grant day after to-morrow?"

"I am glad to meet you, lieutenant," was the hearty response.

"You remember me?"

"Lieutenant Kirkland, if I am not mistaken."

"The same," replied that officer, introducing him to his comrades. "I hardly suppose you were expected to report in this style."

"No; I have taken an original route to the fort—one that I don't care about going over again."

"Tell us about it," said the first lieutenant, wheeling his horse the other way, starting him forward on a walk, and adding:

"Captain Campereaux is up the road with the rest of the men, and will wait for us to join him. We heard about you from a ranchman named Bragg, who said you had been killed by falling over the gorge with the stage."

"I came very near it," remarked Dick, "and

he had every reason to believe that he had seen the last of me, but I was lucky."

And then, as their animals walked slowly along the mountain highway, Lieutenant Dick related the story with which the reader is familiar. Like the modest fellow that he was, he avoided everything in the nature of boasting, and minified his remarkable exploits as much as he could ; but there was no concealing his plucky achievements, for he had to admit that he saved himself from death in going over the gorge, avoided a dangerous rattlesnake in the act of striking him, escaped a grizzly bear, flung an Apache from his horse, when the warrior was striving to slay him, captured a stray pony, and joined his friends with only a few insignificant scratches received from his enemy.

Surely there was enough in all this to justify pride, and the hearts of the listeners were stirred with admiration as they heard the striking narrative.

By the time the story was finished, the little party reached the main company, which was drawn up in the road and debating the best course to pursue, while awaiting the return of Lieutenant Kirkland and his comrades.

Here Dick Whitcomb received a general intro-

duction, and after the exchange of a few questions and answers, he was obliged to repeat the story of his experience.

It was an impressive sight, as he sat on his Indian pony, in the middle of the mountain road, the bright moon shining down on the group, as the others held their steeds motionless, and with their eyes fixed on his face, listened to the thrilling narrative.

They were old campaigners, some of whom had spent a dozen years in the Indian country, and no modest disclaimer on the part of the narrator—no ingenious attempt to make light of what he had done and to attribute his deliverance to extra good fortune which occasionally follows a man, could blind those veterans to the admirable courage, presence of mind, and wonderful skill displayed by the young lieutenant fresh from West Point.

Nothing draws a set of men to another so much as the very qualities possessed by our hero, so his story, every word of which bore the impress of truth, established Dick Whitcomb in the affections of the hardy campaigners around him.

Captain Campereaux was a grim Indian fighter, whose life had been a romance. He had won his

spurs in the great civil war, and no braver officer ever rushed into the swirl of battle with never a thought of personal peril. He despised a coward as he did a rattlesnake. It was said of him that in the fierce struggle of the Wilderness, he saw one of his own lieutenants shrinking behind a tree. The officer stopped, swerved aside from the charge he was making, just long enough to strike him down, when he rode on as coolly as though nothing had happened, and won his promotion that day.

The captain was a man of few words, and he never opened his mouth until Dick ended his story.

"Boys," said he, turning to his men, "three cheers for Lieutenant Dick Whitcomb of our company."

And weren't they given with a will? The outburst thrilled the blushing youth from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet. He removed his cap and bowed his acknowledgments, too much agitated to speak more than a word or two of thanks.

From the moment he left the East for his long ride to this frontier post in the Southwest, where he had been ordered to report, there had been

scarcely a waking hour in which he had not speculated upon the probable welcome that awaited him. He was aware of the distrust shown by many of the old soldiers against the youthful officers annually sent out by the Government from West Point, and he knew what his course would have to be, in order to gain and retain the respect of these fighters.

Dick did not doubt his own courage, but he believed it would never be conceded by others until it was proven in more than one skirmish and Indian battle. He wondered whether it would be one month, six months, or a year, before he would be considered "one of them."

And behold! Before he had reached the post, the captain of his company had called for three cheers, and they were given with a ringing heartiness which stirred the depths of his very soul.

CHAPTER XIII.

GONE !

WHAT added to the brilliancy of Lieutenant Dick's exploits was the fact that Geronimo was in one of his ugliest moods. Instead of being indifferent toward the whites, as the youth suspected, he seemed inspired with a malignancy greater than ever before.

At the moment when a partial truce was believed to have been patched up with him, something occurred to throw him into irrestrainable rage. Hastily gathering a few of his choice spirits, he left the reservation before he could be hindered, and took to the mountains, whither others of his warriors were sure to follow him, despite the utmost watchfulness of the authorities.

Word had reached Fort Grant that Geronimo instead of going northward, was at no great distance in the direction of Tucson. In the hope of capturing the chief and his few hostiles before they could do much harm, or increase their num-

bers, Captain Campereaux and fifty troopers were sent on his trail, while it was still warm.

They galloped hard, hopeful of surprising the wily enemy. He had been seen by the stage drivers, and there was no little surprise that he had not attacked the stations. He could have done so with much greater success than the road agents, and a sudden dash on his part would have destroyed any one against which it might be made. He carefully avoided these temptations, though he was known to have killed a couple of ranchmen who were foolish enough to count on his friendship, or at least indifference.

It was evident from this that Geronimo meant to wait until his numbers should increase before taking the war-path in his usual whirlwind fashion.

But Dick Whitcomb had walked directly into his clutches, and it was hard to explain why he was not instantly put to a tormenting death. Nothing was clearer than that the chief had no thought of permitting him to get away or escape the fate which he invariably visited upon his prisoners. It is probable that Captain Campereaux was right in saying that Geronimo feared his position in the gorge was too exposed to permit such amusement

without danger of interruption. He was near the public highway, and he must have suspected that as soon as it was known he had left the reservation the cavalry would be after him, and even then were at no great distance. Common prudence, therefore, would suggest that he should defer torturing his captive until secure from interference.

That the Apaches held no other sentiment than that of hatred toward the young officer was proven by the desperate attempt of the interpreter to kill him, even when in such imminent peril himself that his escape was wonderful.

Captain Campereaux and his company reached the station just as Buck Bragg came back from his fruitless attempt to find Lieutenant Dick, whom he had left clinging to the rocks. The station-keeper had arrived some time before with the wounded driver, Zach Emmons, who was made as comfortable as possible.

In the company of cavalry, as a matter of course, there was a surgeon, for nothing was more likely than that his services would be needed before the return. He at once instituted a thorough examination of the driver's wounds, and pronounced them severe, though not necessarily fatal. His

wonderfully strong constitution and rugged health were in his favor, while he was certain to receive the best of nursing at the station.

Since Zach Emmons has completed the part he had to play in this narrative, it may as well be stated that, after a long period of convalescence, he fully recovered, and resumed his place as driver on the old stage line, keeping it up until the route was abandoned and the railroad took its place.

Captain Campereaux did not overlook the money treasure lying in the bottom of the gorge. He could not be too prompt in recovering it, for the news of such things travels fast, and there were many desperate characters in Arizona who would hasten thither to secure the prize unless they were anticipated.

He detailed six men under Lieutenant Whitcomb to wait at the station until daylight, when they were to set out to recover the money and bring it to the fort, where it would be held for the owners. The same number of pack mules were placed at the disposal of the lieutenant, and his horse was exchanged for one of the best in the company, with a fine saddle and accoutrements.

"I am not losing any time," thought Dick, with

a smile, as he set out early the next morning to perform the duty assigned him ; "my orders entitle me to another day's vacation, but I am glad to have something like this to do."

Among the half dozen men under command of Lieutenant Dick were four respecting whom some information must be briefly given.

Walter Windstrom was an Irishman by birth, who enlisted when barely of age, and had become so familiar with the Southwest that this fact, united with his coolness, bravery and readiness of resource, rendered him one of the most valuable of scouts. Most of his life had been spent in this country, so that his brogue was so slight that only at times was it apparent.

His closest friend was Josh Joggens, a tall, lank New Englander, who made his debut in the Territory of Arizona during its early days, as a school teacher. His roaming disposition led him to lay aside his book and ferule after a brief while and to enter the service of the United States as a member of the famous Sixth Cavalry. He was an excellent marksman, and had become an expert horseman in his youth. In addition to these qualifications, he possessed courage and coolness, so that it was

inevitable that he should make a first-class soldier in every respect.

While Windstrom was short, heavy and somewhat sluggish of movement, Joggens was lank, attenuated and remarkably quick. The New Englander was an ardent Protestant, while Windstrom was a devout Catholic, and yet they were so warmly attached that each would have gladly risked his life for the other, as he had done in more than one instance.

The remaining two members of the squad, who were destined soon to become involved with the lieutenant in a series of stirring experiences, were Ray Bedford and Walter Braxton. The former was only a couple of years older than Lieutenant Dick, while the latter was a man in middle life. These four had been so incessantly engaged on the border that they could not fail to acquire great knowledge of the Indian country. They were among the most valuable scouts in the service, and had won honorable mention for more than one daring achievement in the campaigns against the Apaches.

It was complimentary to Lieutenant Dick that he was placed in command of a company including

four such men, and the compliment was still more marked when the fact is made known that the quartette were highly pleased with their youthful leader, who, less than a week before, had never set foot in the Indian country.

Lieutenant Dick had a good memory of places, and, despite the unfavorable conditions of the night before, he retained such a clear recollection of the ground passed over, that he had no difficulty in retracing the steps by which he had left the gorge in the company of Geronimo and his warriors.

The sloping path leading to the bottom of the gorge was speedily reached, and Dick took the lead with the others, the pack mules following them. The animals were accustomed to rough travelling, and needed no direction. They carefully picked their way down the steep descent. The leader was highly pleased with his animal, which was spirited, clean-limbed, intelligent, and yet easily controlled. He felt grateful to Captain Campereaux for his thoughtfulness in providing such a valuable beast; and, take it altogether, it will be admitted that the youth had every reason to feel delighted over his advent into the active service of his country.

Carefully and slowly the procession wound its

way down the precipitous side of the gorge, until at last the whole party stood at the base, not far from where Geronimo and his warriors had kindled the campfire the night before. Near the spot a brief halt was made, and the immense carcass of the grizzly bear was viewed with no little wonder.

"I have seen a good many of the animals in Lower California," said Joggens, "but I don't think any of them were as large as that."

"It took some of the strongest bombarding by the whole company to bring him down," remarked the lieutenant. "I should have been in a bad fix but for the Apaches."

"Not much worse than ye were with the same," said Windstrom, "for it was only jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire."

"I think if I had been in your place," added Ray Bedford, "I would have taken the bear instead of Geronimo."

"So would I, had I known what I since learned, and yet you can see how much worse it would have resulted for me."

"There's no forecasting such things," was the remark of Walter Braxton; "the safest rule for a

man to follow is to do what seems the right thing at the moment the crisis comes."

"It is a good rule no doubt at times," replied Dick, "but it is not always the safest course."

Facing southward, the party discovered that a faint trail led through the gorge for an indefinite distance. Had the lieutenant known of its existence the night before, a laborious tramp would have been saved him. Like all such paths, it was very tortuous, the bowlders compelling many detours.

"There's where the stage said good-bye when it took its plunge," remarked the lieutenant some time later, as he drew up his steed, "and I followed it part of the way."

The group spent several minutes in gazing at the scene of the disaster. The solid stone wall, as has been stated, was fully three hundred feet high. While there was a slight slope for most of the distance, there were many portions where it was a sheer perpendicular, and from a point fifty feet above the base the wall trended inward. No wonder the tough old coach was shattered to fragments.

Wearied at length with gazing aloft and com-

menting on the remarkable occurrence, the soldiers gave their attention to the business that had brought them thither.

"I don't know how much wealth is here," said Dick, as they gathered about the ruins of the coach, "but there must be considerable."

"Enough to tempt a fellow to take a trip to Canada and stay till it blows over," laughed Ray Bedford. "But where is it?" he added, looking inquiringly around.

The lieutenant's heart was in his mouth. Recalling the canvas bags he had seen the night before in the moonlight, he glanced hither and thither in a vain search for them.

Not one of them was in sight.

"Boys," said he, "we were as prompt as we could be, but some one has been here ahead of us. *The money is gone!*"

Such was the fact.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MASS OF ROCKS.

It was a startling discovery that was made by the squad of cavalry which halted at the bottom of the gorge to gather up the money that had fallen from the bursted treasure box of Wells & Fargo.

Hardly ten hours had passed since the smashing of the stage, and most of those hours were darkness, and yet every dollar had been taken away. Not one of the single canvas bags remained.

"I wonder whether Geronimo came back here after his repulse last night," said Lieutenant Dick.

Windstrom and Joggens had dismounted, and now stooped down and began examining the ground as closely as a couple of Indians could have done. Whoever the thieves were, they could not help leaving traces behind, and those keen, experienced eyes were sure to detect them.

"They weren't Indians," was the significant remark of Joggens at the end of a few minutes.

"Then they must have been white men," replied

Dick ; "can you form any idea of their number ?"

"There were not many——"

"Be the powers !" broke in Windstrom, "there was but *a single one*. Isn't he a bowld sojer boy ?"

This information was almost too astounding to be credited, but Josh Joggens confirmed it. All the money had been taken by a solitary person.

By this time the rest were dismounted, and scrutinizing the earth in the immediate vicinity. Joggens and Windstrom, however, were the only ones with enough skill to speak with certainty. They followed the footprints a couple of rods from the spot, and repeated what they said a few minutes before ; one individual had carried off the entire amount of gold, amounting to many thousand dollars.

The discoveries of the two scouts authorized a number of important conclusions. The gold was too heavy for one man to transport, and he must therefore have made several trips—a fact which made the declaration of the scouts more striking.

But this individual wore heavy shoes with peculiarly large nails in the heels. Wherever the tracks could be seen clearly, the imprint of those nails was unmistakable.

This being the case, it was quite certain that the thief could not have traveled far. The trail led toward a mass of rocks on the other side of the gorge, which at that point expanded into a width of a couple of hundred yards.

"He's over there now, among those rocks, watching us," said Joggens, pointing at the place, which all surveyed with no little interest; "he has meant to hide the stuff there till he can take it away piecemeal."

"But he forgot that we have scouts who can follow a trail as skillfully as any of the Apaches," was the complimentary remark of the lieutenant.

"It's easy enough to track that spalpeen," observed Windstrom; "but I don't believe we'll git the money without a fight."

The company consulted several minutes, all standing on the ground by their horses' heads.

The conclusion of Lieutenant Dick was concurred in by all the rest. This was, that one of the three road agents of the night before, knowing that the stage carried a treasure box, and learning that the coach had gone over the precipice, had followed it. He was not accompanied by the other two, because one of them had been killed, and the

other, if not dead, was badly wounded. Nor was it improbable that the remaining robber was injured, for it will be remembered that the fight was of the sharpest nature.

All were convinced, too, that the scamp was among the rocks, where, with his Winchester, he would fight to the death in defense of the treasure for which he had risked so much.

He could not have chosen a better place. The stones and bowlders were piled together with enough space behind them to give the strongest kind of fort. A score of men, thus sheltered, could hold ten times their number at bay. At the rear of the mass rose the other side of the chasm, too steep to be climbed by a chamois. A party driven at bay, therefore, within the rude defense, could not withdraw without being seen by those in front. If the thief was still there, he was hemmed in.

"I have a misgiving that he may have left," said the lieutenant, while discussing the matter.

"The question can be soon settled," replied Joggens, who gave a nod to Windstrom.

"All right," responded the Irishman.

Immediately the two separated, one going to the

right and the other to the left, both facing the rocks, in which their chief interest at that moment lay.

They had not walked far, when they wheeled so as to approach the side of the ravine on which was the pile of rocks. Then they slowly stepped forward, with their heads bent, until they could go no further. Turning about, they repeated the performance, scarcely raising their eyes from the ground until they rejoined the group.

It will be seen that by this course they examined every part of the ground over which the stranger must have walked had he left his refuge. Windstrom discovered the marks of his shoes where he had reached the spot by another course than that followed by the cavalry, but neither he nor Joggens could detect any trail leading away.

The conclusion was inevitable ; the man was still among the rocks, doubtless glaring out like a tiger traced to his lair before he can finish his stolen feast.

“You are right,” said Lieutenant Dick ; “and it only remains to decide how we shall oust him from his quarters.”

“Possibly he possesses some sense,” ventured

one of the men, "and if the situation is impressed upon him, and we promise to let him off free, he may give up the money."

"That is doubtful, but it's worth trying—helloa! what's this?"

Another of the soldiers, named Jones, had kicked over a bit of stone, beneath which were a number of papers. Picking them up, he passed them to the lieutenant. The latter found only one of interest; that was the invoice or consignment of the gold sent by Wells & Fargo to certain parties in Snow Flake City, which is more than a hundred miles north of Fort Grant, from which point the funds were to be sent by an armed escort.

The interesting feature about this paper was that it gave the exact amount, which was one hundred thousand dollars, all in gold, and tied in twenty strong canvas bags, each containing five thousand dollars.

Such an amount of yellow metal makes a good load for four men at least, and it was no wonder, therefore, that the individual engaged in removing it was obliged to make several journeys back and forth.

"I didn't count the bags last night," said the

lieutenant, "for the darkness was not favorable, but I should judge there were about that many. I am glad to know the exact number, for we now have something definite to work upon."

"Suppose," ventured Joggens, "that the thief should offer to compromise, wouldn't it be advisable to do so?"

"In what way?"

"Why, since he has the hundred thousand dollars, suppose we offer to let him keep five and go away unmolested. Wouldn't it be prudent to close up the transaction that way?"

"It would be," replied Dick, "provided the money was our own; but we have no right to do anything of the kind without the consent of Wells & Fargo, to whom it belongs until turned over to the custody of the consignees."

"There can be no disputing that," remarked Joggens; "but isn't it fair to believe Messrs. Wells & Fargo will willingly give one-twentieth of the amount to secure nineteen-twentieths?"

"They would, when satisfied that it wasn't just as easy to get the twenty-twentieths; but I suspect it will be hard to convince them of that when they learn that there was but a single thief and

seven United States cavalrymen who were parties to the contract."

Josh Joggens laughed heartily, for he saw he was vanquished in the first argument he had undertaken with their new lieutenant.

"All right," said he, "I agree with you; we must have it all or none."

CHAPTER XV.

THE ACCOUNT CLOSED.

OBVIOUSLY there was but one way to open negotiations with the daring rogue, and that duty was assigned to Joggens.

Drawing his white handkerchief from his pocket, he swayed it above his head just enough to make sure its purpose of serving as a flag of truce could not be mistaken, and advanced toward the pile of rocks.

He walked slowly, and his senses were on the alert. Confident that the man with whom he wished to hold a brief converse was equally vigilant, the New Englander expected him to make some demonstration, or at least to show himself before his defense was reached.

Now, since the gorge was comparatively narrow, the stranger could have been hailed very readily by Lieutenant Whitcomb without stirring from where he stood, but it was in better form to send forward a messenger with the token of peace.

Joggens ran some personal risk in thus advancing from his comrades, for the man among the rocks, knowing what the whole affair meant, was not likely to pay much heed to the usages of civilized warfare. Josh, however, did not propose to take any unnecessary risk, and he came to a halt when fully a hundred feet separated him from the defenses, and when, therefore, he was about midway between them and his friends.

At the very moment of halting, he caught sight of that for which he was looking. A slight movement directed his eyes to one of the numerous crevices between the bowlders, and there, too plainly to be mistaken, was the muzzle of a rifle projecting only a few inches.

"Helloa, in there!" called the messenger, without any apparent alarm in his voice.

"Wal, what do you want?"

The query was like the growl of a grizzly bear, and was heard by all the troopers, none of whom, however, had yet caught sight of the ominous muzzle behind the bowlders.

"We would like to have a few words with you."

"Wal, who's hinderin' you?" was asked in the same surly voice as before.

"The stage went over the rocks last night, and twenty bags of gold broke out of the treasure chest. You have it all with you, and we have come after it."

"All you've got to do is to git it," said the rogue with a chuckle that was heard by the rest, who had discovered the end of his gun barrel by the sound of his voice. "I don't think us chaps went to the trouble of carryin' the stuff in here to give it up to the first lot of chumps that come along. No, sir; we mean to fight for such wages, and if you don't believe it, all you've got to do is to try to get it away from us."

Josh Joggens did not hesitate to speak to the point:

"That might do, my friend, with some folks, but you can't fool us. You are alone; you carried off the gold, making several journeys to do it. Your trail is too plain to be mistaken. Your two companions of last night would have been with you had they been able, but the passengers in the coach made it rather too warm for them. We understand the situation too well to be mistaken; we have come after that money, and shall not go back without it. If you will give it up we will let

you depart unharmed ; if not, you must take the consequences."

The man behind the rocks must have been surprised by these words, but it cannot be said he was scared. He had failed in his first little piece of strategy, but his resolution to defend his stolen property to the last was not diminished.

"Bein' as you want the straight tip, you shall have it," he said. "If you and Captain Camper-eaux was out thar with a hundred cavalrymen, you couldn't scare me into givin' the yaller metal up without a fight. It's too hard work to git the stuff for me to give it up jest 'cause some one asks me. I expect you to fight ; tharfore sail in, and by way of openin' the music I'll start the tune with *this*."

And slightly shifting his gun, so as to make his aim sure, he deliberately discharged it at the New Englander.

But among the most striking characteristics of Josh Joggens was his intuitive reading of the purposes of another, when the situation was similar to the present. From the moment the outlaw uttered the words which made known his resolve to fight to the last, Josh was certain he would attempt

some treachery, for while he had something to gain, he had absolutely nothing to lose by his savagery.

Immediately following this declaration was the sentence announcing his purpose of firing. This was like the note of the rattlesnake, though of less extent, and, accompanied as it was by a move of his Winchester, the New Englander received perhaps two seconds' warning.

But it was enough. Had the discharged bullet passed through his heart, his fall to the earth could not have been more sudden. Indeed it was so nearly simultaneous with the firing of the gun that every one of the troopers behind him believed it was because he was struck by the bullet.

But the next instant the mistake was evident. Josh Joggens, instead of falling in an open place, had dropped behind a bowlder, alongside which he had been wise enough to place himself before opening the interview with the miscreant. To relieve the minds of his friends from all apprehension, he now turned his homely face toward them, and with a broad smile, waved his hand to them.

"He's up to some trick, is the spalpeen," said Winstrom in a guarded voice. "He wants the

other felly to believe he's dead and we mustn't give him away."

"It's a wonder he isn't," replied Lieutenant Dick, whose bosom heaved with indignation at the act of treachery. "We're within gunshot; why doesn't the thief open on *us*?"

"He will mighty soon; let's get the horses down where they'll be safe, and look out for ourselves."

The suggestion was a wise one, and was promptly acted upon. The steeds were accustomed to such handling, and they readily lay down where the bowlders offered secure protection, while the owners were equally expeditious in taking to shelter themselves.

The man in the rocks could easily have picked off one or two, while this was going on, but he felt so secure that he broke into a brutal laugh.

"Gettin' scared, be you?" he called out; "there's only one of me; why don't you step up to the captain's office and settle?"

"We ain't through yet," replied Lieutenant Whitcomb, who became convinced from what he saw on the part of Josh Joggens that he was about to attempt some scheme, whose character he did not fully understand. Since it was plain, how-

ever, that the New Englander wished the outlaw to believe his shot had been fatal, Dick did his best to carry out the strategy.

“We supposed you would respect the flag of truce. We certainly would have shown you that courtesy, instead of shooting down the bearer like a dog in his tracks.”

The outlaw laughed again.

“That’s a little way I have. I knowed you would soon begin doin’ your best to shoot me, and so what’s the use of waitin’? I hope that green-horn didn’t suffer any.”

“Poor fellow!” said the lieutenant, “he don’t seem to have suffered at all; you deserve a dozen deaths for shooting him down in that way.”

“Wal, all you’ve got to do is to get the bulge on me and shoot; I’m waitin’ for another flag of truce.”

“I’ll own that you are pretty well fixed, and it will be a hard job to rout you out; but if we can’t shoot you, we can hold you there till you starve or perish with thirst.”

“Go ahead and do it then!” was the defiant response; “maybe I hain’t anything to eat here, and maybe there ain’t no water to be reached.”

“That sort of bluff is like the story of having companions with you, when we disposed of them last night ; but I know it will take several days to bring you to terms by that means, and I’m ready to open negotiations.”

“You heard what I spoke to that fool that run agin a rifle ball of mine didn’t you?”

“I’ll give you the credit of believing you will regret that when you come to think coolly over it. I am ready to hear a proposition from you, and, if we accept it, I pledge you the word of an honorable man that it will be lived up to by all of us.”

The outlaw seemed to see good cause for mirth in the situation, for here his coarse laugh was again heard.

“Wal, my proposition is that you call your men off and leave me alone. I’ll promise not to shoot any more, if they don’t look behind them.”

“That is very kind, but surely you will do better. You have a cool hundred thousand with you ; suppose you keep ten and let us have the rest?”

“Couldn’t think of it.”

“Well, say twenty.”

“No use.”

"Twenty five ; I'll make an offer of fifty thousand—that's one half, and it will leave enough to satisfy any reasonable man."

Now, as it may strike the reader that Lieutenant Whitcomb was indulging in a profitless business, it must be stated at this point (though in view of what has already been said, the statement ought not to be necessary), and the young officer had not the least hope that any agreement could be reached, for he had resolved from the first that every dollar of the amount should be recovered.

But peering from behind the rock, where he was sheltered, he could plainly see Josh Joggins grinning and nodding his head by way of encouragement. The New Englander felt that Dick had caught on to his scheme, and was doing his part well.

It was manifest that the scout wished his friends to keep the attention of the outlaw engaged, so as to leave him freer to carry out his own design. He was not laggard in his movements, either, for while he was nodding and smiling, he was carefully creeping along the ground to the right, with a view of approaching the rocks from a different point, without being noticed by the man.

The first movement of the scout made clear to his friends his scheme, which was certainly highly perilous, since it was impossible for him to affect the circuit without exposing himself more than once to the fire of the outlaw, should he discover the plot.

It will be seen, therefore, that Lieutenant Whitcomb had the strongest possible reason for keeping up the conversation, since, while the fellow was talking, he was quite sure to hold his gaze fixed on the rock from behind which came the voice of the officer.

The outlaw was imprudent, to say the least, in rejecting the munificent terms he must have believed he could secure from the men who certainly commanded the situation; but he was a desperado, whose long career of crime had rendered him reckless where others equally brave would have been cautious.

"I've told you what I would do," he said in answer to the proposal to divide the large sum equally.

"But you must be jesting. You will surely agree that we should receive something for what we have undergone."

"Wal, I don't mind bein' generous, since you think you ought to have a bite. I'll give you one of the bags of yellow stuff, that is five thousand, which is a good deal more than the man's life was worth that I shot."

"Make it twenty five thousand."

"Not a cent more than what I said—five thousand."

"Take a few minutes to consider."

"No use—"

The full reply of the outlaw was cut short by a rifle shot. Josh Joggens, by daring and expeditious work, had secured his coign of advantage, from which he gained a view of the head and shoulders of the unsuspecting criminal, and he improved it on the instant,

A surprise awaited the troopers when they sprang to their feet and hurried behind the pile of rocks. The features of the dead outlaw were recognized by Joggens, Windstrom, Bedford and Braxton as those of Bud Zimcoe, the king of road agents, for whose capture dead or alive the authorities had offered a reward of five thousand dollars.

And it was just like Josh Joggens, when he obtained the full reward, to insist, in the face of all

protests, on dividing it equally among his companions and himself.

The entire hundred thousand dollars was found piled near the body of the outlaw, and was safely transported to Fort Grant, where Lieutenant Whitcomb arrived with his command on the very day he was ordered to report at that post by the Honorable Secretary of War.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MOUNTAIN RAVINE.

IT need not be said that Lieutenant Whitcomb received a cordial welcome from the soldiers at Fort Grant. It may be claimed that in a certain sense he had already won his spurs, by the series of stirring incidents in which he became involved before officially entering the service of his country. As we have stated, no men are readier to recognize bravery in others than those who possess the quality themselves, and the reception accorded Dick brought a blush to his handsome features more than once.

Within the week following Captain Campeaux's return from his raid, information came to Fort Grant that Geronimo and his gang were in the mountains, about one hundred miles from the San Carlos Reservation. The report was brought by two of the captain's most trusty scouts, and he placed such faith in it that he resolved to act upon it without delay.

Like scores of other officers, he had been baffled and outwitted so often by the Apache leader that he felt a personal eagerness for another "whack at him," as it was termed. He chafed under his restraint, and the letters received from the East, pleasantly inquiring whether the best plan was not to try to buy up the handful of hostiles, and save expenses to the Government by boarding them at the Astor House the year round, were not calculated to soothe the temper of the grim warrior. Then, too, the leading journals which reached him were so full of criticisms, written by the wise editors, many of whom had never seen a wild Indian, that he felt like wiping out the redskins first and then calling those sapient gentlemen to account.

It will be understood, therefore, that the captain and his brother officers gladly seized the chance to strike a blow which they hoped would be the final one against Geronimo.

Dick Whitcomb's heart throbbed with delight when he learned that he was to be a member of the company selected to attack the dusky miscreants in their own chosen fastnesses, where they believed they could laugh at all attempts of our cavalry. Preparations were speedily completed, and, three

nights later, just as the sun was setting, the cavalry went into bivouac in one of the wildest ravines to the northward of the San Carlos Reservation.

The brave men had ridden into the yawning chasm, where they were surrounded on every side by foot hills and mountains, deeply wooded with pine, scrub oak and juniper, the cottonwood growing luxuriantly in the valley, where the weary soldiers unsaddled to give the animals the rest they needed as much as themselves.

The grass was luxuriant, a stream of clear, icy cold water flowed near the camp, and the steeds and pack mules cropped the grass under the vigilant eyes of the herd guard, while several soldiers, as seen in the glow of the camp fire, were busy preparing the evening meal for the members of the command. There were laughter and quirk and jest, although the troopers were engaged on most serious business.

At the moment the halt was made, Josh Joggens and Walter Windstrom had ridden up from an opposite direction. Their horses were coated with foam, for they had covered many a mile since sun up, and more than once the vengeful Apache bullets had whistled about the ears of their riders ;

but they had come the long distance in safety, bringing important news with them.

The hot, suffocating weather had given way to the cooler temperature of October, though even now during the middle of the day the sun shone down with a power and splendor known hardly anywhere outside of Arizona and New Mexico.

The cavalry were under the command of Captain Campereaux and Lieutenant Whitcomb. First Lieutenant Kirkland was so seriously ill that, despite his protests, he had been left behind at Fort Grant during this hunt after the fierce leader of the Apaches.

The stirring news brought by Joggens and Windstrom was to the effect that they had definitely located Geronimo and his warriors in the mountains, no more than a mile distant. The savages had been followed hard, but with their amazing dexterity and skill they had forced their way into the lonely defile, without the *dernier ressort* of separating, to unite again at some rendezvous agreed upon.

"The moon doesn't rise till nearly eleven o'clock," said the captain to Lieutenant Whitcomb, the surgeon, and several who had gathered around

the group to discuss the news. "That will give us time for supper and rest. We will leave our horses with a strong camp guard, and fifty of us will set out about midnight for the spot where I hope we shall wind up the clock of Geronimo."

Although the prospect of a furious fight close at hand stirred the blood of all, yet these campaigners had become so accustomed to peril that it produced no effect on their appetites or their desire for sleep. The food was devoured with the keen relish of men who lead the most active of out-door lives, pipes were smoked, jests again exchanged, and finally those who were to take part in the enterprise stretched out on their blankets, sinking off to rest as quickly and sweetly as so many tired children.

There were a few who did not close their eyes. Captain Campereaux sat under a tree, where the firelight rendered his features visible, and talked now and then in low tones with the surgeon, who was calmly examining his instruments, and placing them in order for the work that would most likely be required of them within the next few hours.

Joggens, Windstrom, and Lieutenant Whitcomb were asleep. Just beyond the circle of light thrown

out by the camp fire were the guard, alert and vigilant; for confident as were the scouts that the Apaches did not suspect the proximity of the soldiers, possibly they were mistaken, and while the white men slept the Indians might steal upon them unawares.

Everything was hushed. Now and then the stamp or faint whinny of some animal broke the stillness, but even the horses seemed to be affected by the scene, for the sounds lacked the vigor noticeable at other times.

From where the captain sat, he could occasionally catch sight of a shadowy figure as it moved with slow, regular pace within the limits of the fire-light, each listening and watching with all the power at his command, for no caution could be too great when in the country of the Apaches.

Captain Campereaux smiled as the surgeon ran his thumb along the razor-like edge of his dreadful implements, and tested their fitness with critical eye and touch, expressing a wonder as to whether he would be the first upon whom they would be used, and speculating whether, after all, the boys wouldn't do as well if the surgeon himself should fall into the power of Geronimo.

It was a strange, weird scene, oft repeated during the scouting back and forth of our cavalry in their exhausting hunt for the dusky fiends of the Southwest, whose activity, skill and endurance seem to surpass that of any other people.

But while the captain and surgeon swapped jokes and indulged in their curious speculations, each pleased at the prospect of the serious work close at hand, the moon appeared above the tree tops, which it gilded with silver, while the bottom of the ravine was wrapped in darkness, save where illumined by the bivouac fire.

At intervals the captain leaned toward the blaze and looked at his watch, his manner showing that to him the hours were passing with leaden feet. Slowly the minute hand of his watch crept round until close to the XII. While it still lacked a moment or two of the even hour, the head officer signalled to the sergeant, who was expecting it. Then, in low, guarded tones, the command was given:

"Up with you, boys!"

It was no time for bugle, réveille, roll call, or assembly. Silence was requisite above all things. The soldiers promptly rolled out of their blankets

and hastily strapped them into bundles, which with their belongings were quickly placed in shape for conveyance on mule back, and turned over to the packers for their care.

Within less than fifteen minutes everything was ready. A strong force, under trusty non-commissioned officers, stayed behind to guard the packs and herds, while the fifty troopers gathered in the light of the camp fire, and awaited orders, which were not long in coming to the expectant group.

The commands were given in the same low tones, for all Captain Campereaux's soldiers felt that the rocks around them had ears, and the least sound was likely to defeat the object of the expedition. The men were told to make sure their canteens did not rattle, and were directed to keep as much as possible in the wall of shadow, which momentarily grew less as the moon climbed nearer and nearer the zenith.

CHAPTER XVII.

THEY ARE THERE.

THE lead was taken by Joggens and Windstrom, while close behind them followed the captain, the lieutenant, and the doctor, with the soldiers straggling along in no order, but with the silence of phantoms. For a while the men advanced in couples, but points were continually reached where only a single file was permitted. At such times. Windstrom fell behind Joggens, who invariably kept at the head, the others imitating the leaders' actions without speaking a word.

The path was rough, similar in many respects to that which led through the gorge into which the stage coach plunged, and the windings and turns were so frequent that the tramp became tiresome, even to the men who were accustomed to the severest kind of traveling.

But there was no call for haste, since Captain Campereaux meant to adopt the practice of the

Apaches themselves, who, like all their race, prefer to make their attacks just before dawn, when their foes, if unwarned, are sure to be sleeping the most soundly. But it was necessary to get the men in position, so that the blow, when it should fall, should be irresistible.

By and by those in the rear found themselves closing up—proof that the front had halted. Joggens and Windstrom had stopped, and the captain, the lieutenant, and the doctor gathered around them.

“Here is the spot,” whispered the New Englander, whose keen sight told him, despite the darkness, the precise place where the ascent was to be made to reach the plateau where Geronimo and his men had gone into camp early in the evening.

It was the custom of the bodies of cavalry, when pushing through the Apache country, to take with them several native scouts, who at times rendered valuable service. The stealthy, serpent-like individuals were more capable of following their own race into the mountain fastnesses and through the wild canyons than any Caucasian could be; but that person who deliberately turns against his own

people, is always an object of distrust. Captain Campereaux could not repose confidence in his Apache scouts to the extent necessary.

Less than two weeks before, when following the guidance of three of the native scouts, he was led into a trap from which he extricated his command only with the greatest difficulty, and after the loss of several of his men. During the fight he made sure that every one of the trio who had played the "double cross" on him were put beyond the power of repeating their treachery. Since then, he had resolutely refused to make use of any more native trailers, and he had none with him on this expedition.

It took but a few minutes for the soldiers to understand what was required of them. Joggens and Windstrom were about to lead the way up the steep trail, the rest to follow with the same stealth, care, and silence that they had shown from the first. There must be no slip now, for the Apache sleeps as lightly as a panther, and the snapping of a twig is enough to arouse him from slumber.

While the few whispered directions were passing, Joggens had sunk on his knees and was scrutinizing the ground, dimly revealed here and there by the

moon, which was at its full and unobscured by a cloud.

The examination confirmed what he had said. The Apaches had climbed by the same trail to the plateau above, and stretched themselves in the open space to rest till dawn.

"It is best to make sure they are there, before we begin the ascent," said Captain Campereaux, "for they may have discovered us and set an ambush."

"All right," replied the chief scout, who instantly glided from the spot, with Windstrom nigh enough to touch him with his outstretched hand.

The two vanished instantly, and were gone for nearly a half hour, when they reappeared as abruptly as if the ground had cast them up in front of their comrades.

"Well, what is it?" asked the captain, in a whisper.

"*They are there,*" replied Joggens; "I think we have them in a hole this time."

"Heaven grant it! We have hunted them long enough."

The progress was now very slow, for no care

could be too great. Joggens and Windstrom were at the head, as usual, and it was characteristic of them that when they came in contact with some loose fragment of rock that was easily moved, they lifted it from the path. If the stone was too heavy to be handled, they emitted a faint sibilant sound, to warn those behind them that unusual caution was necessary.

By and by the ascending trail seemed to end. There was no longer any path to follow, and it was necessary to creep over the bowlders and rocks in their way. Over them the men went unhesitatingly crawling on all fours, and spreading out on either hand, looking in the moonlight like so many huge bees climbing up the mountain side.

Suddenly Captain Campereaux uttered a guarded execration. He had caught the clink of a canteen against the rocks behind him. The whispered order to halt was instantly given, followed by the command to the men to remove their canteens. The crisis was too close at hand for any chances to be taken.

The vessels were noiselessly laid aside, the surgeon being the only one allowed to retain his. Then the advance was renewed, the captain finding

it necessary, a few minutes later, to warn the men that they were crowding forward too fast. In their eagerness they were running the risk of ruining the whole plan of campaign.

By this time the entire command had climbed beyond the shade of the juniper trees and stunted pines, and were in full sight of each other. All around were rocks and boulders, while a short distance above—not more than twenty feet, in fact—was the edge of the plateau toward which they have been struggling so long.

The tall, lank New Englander rose to his feet, and, turning so as to face the men, pointed to the flat ledge above. He looked like some ghostly leader, gesticulating to his shadowy followers, for no sound escaped his lips.

None was needed, for the gesture said as plainly as any words could have done :

“The Apaches are up there !”

Captain Campereaux, Lieutenant Whitcomb, and the surgeon, who were near the scouts, closed around them, and several minutes' consultation took place. Joggens and Windstrom explained that the plateau was perhaps two acres in extent, and roughly square in shape. At the upper side

bubbled forth a mountain spring, which trickled across the level space, and found its way down the mountain to the valley below. So profound was the stillness that the listening soldiers could catch the faint trickle of the water a number of rods away.

Lieutenant Whitcomb and several others were sure they could detect the odor of tobacco in the air—the remnant of the pipes that had been smoked by the Apaches hours before, and which had lingered in the still atmosphere ever since.

Crouching thus on the very edge of the plateau, Joggens and Windstrom once more carefully explained the “lay of the land.”

The problem that was presented was plain. Geronimo and twenty of his followers were stretched out on their blankets near the middle of the plateau, where they had eaten their supper and smoked their pipes the evening previous. Their ponies were concealed at some point deeper in the mountains, where they were inaccessible to the white soldiers, who little cared, since it was the owners of the animals they were after.

Could the chieftain and his party be exterminated then and there, a long, costly and devas-

tating Indian war would be averted, and years of appalling ferocity, cruelty and desolation be brought to an end. Every soldier realized this truth, and was eager to bear a hand in bringing about the consummation.

As each participated in the risk incurred, so would each share in the glory resulting from a successful issue of the present expedition.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ONE OF MANY.

THE plan of campaign was simple. The best investigation that Joggens and Windstrom could make showed that there was but the single trail leading to the small plateau, though in the stress of an attack the agile Apaches would doubtless find it easy to leave the place by any point of the compass.

The plan, as explained by Captain Campereaux, was for the men to surround the sleeping Apaches, and then, at the command, open fire with carbine and rifle, and shoot down the wretches from every direction. They were sure to fight like tigers, but the whites were equally brave, and outnumbered them more than two to one. There would be no quarter given or taken on either side; the fight was to be to the death.

Captain Campereaux held up the face of his watch, so that the full moonlight fell upon it.

“Half past four,” he whispered. “It will begin

to grow light in less than an hour. We have no time to lose. Lieutenant, I count upon you to see that no mistake is made."

Lieutenant Dick nodded his head and made a half salute, to signify he would do his best. Then he moved off to help place his men.

It looked as if there was neither order nor system in the movements which followed, but every individual taking part in them was intelligent and knew precisely what was expected of him. The huge bees spread out more and more, extending further and further around the silent plateau, until the right wing joined the left.

It had taken a full half hour to do this, for the obstacles were many, the way rugged, and the necessity for caution as great as it could possibly be. It was accomplished, however, without the slightest mishap on the part of anyone, and Captain Campereaux was in higher spirits than ever.

"They are surrounded," he reflected, "and no matter what they may do, they can't get away without a fight, and a fight with a chance to do something is what I am after."

The cordon having been extended around the plateau, the men, in obedience to a cautious signal,

began climbing over the margin of the Apache camping-ground. Day could not be far off, and the music was certain to open in a short time.

Having reached the point where they were to await the signal of attack, all lay flat on their faces and peered over the comparatively level space with the most intense interest. During the preceding few minutes, the moon had become partially clouded, so that the vision was not as perfect as it would have been earlier in the night. They saw, too, that the middle of the plateau contained a number of loose bowlders, against which probably the camp fire had been kindled, and was now smoldering.

All this prevented them seeing distinctly, and it was almost impossible for the sharpest vision to make out the dark figures stretched on the ground and wrapped in their blankets.

"*But they are there,*" was the thought of each of the half hundred men, "and we have them walled in. Geronimo's race is well-nigh run."

Amidst the profound stillness, one of the soldiers, lying on his face at the point where the tiny stream trickled down from the plateau, leaned forward to take a drink. He had to move only a few

inches, but, as he did so, his foot struck a small stone, which rolled over the edge of the plateau, coming to a stop almost instantly.

The sound startled him, but it was so light that it was not heard fifty feet away. Captain Campereaux was within that distance, and it did not reach his ear, though Lieutenant Dick, about the same way off on the other side, noticed it with a throb of misgiving.

"Sound travels far at such a time," he thought, "and that may have done harm, but, after all, I don't see how it can affect the situation, since we have them penned in."

All at once, the hundred eyes centered on the boulders in the middle of the plateau saw an interesting sight. A tiny, star-like point of light gleamed out, as though one of the hostiles had ignited a lucifer match; but it expanded with increasing brightness, proving that one of the redskins had started the fire anew.

As the flame increased, the figure of a single warrior was seen bending over it. He was motionless for a minute, and then he withdrew, so that he was no longer visible in the gloom which enveloped plateau and mountain.

No better proof could be given of the fancied security of the Apache leader and his men than the fact that he had not a single guard stationed round the camp. Had he dreamed that his enemies were anywhere within striking distance, a fourth of his best warriors would have been on the watch, and the approach of the troopers undiscovered rendered impossible.

Suddenly, from out of the gloom, Lieutenant Whitcomb caught the outlines of an Indian. He had walked slowly from the tiny fire, and, without the least warning, stood in front of the young officer not more than fifty feet distant. The bank of clouds that had been creeping up the sky for the last half hour now fully veiled the face of the moon, so that but for the blaze it would have been impossible to locate the camp.

But it must soon begin growing light in the east. Daybreak was near, and the signal of Captain Campereaux could not be delayed much longer.

The lieutenant and the soldiers immediately near him saw the single Apache plainly, as he stood for a full minute like a statue. Nothing would have been easier than to shoot him down, and more than one palm itched to do so. But the orders of the leader

were imperative. The command must come from him, and anyone who dared to anticipate him did so at his peril. The captain felt that the responsibility of the attack rested on his shoulders, and he did not mean to shift it to those of any one else.

“It must be that the captain does not see that fellow,” mused Lieutenant Dick, “or he would give the signal.”

While the thought was in his mind, he observed that the Apache was fading from sight. He was walking backward, so carefully that no movement of his limbs could be discerned.

This occurrence, slight of itself, rendered Dick uneasy. While it appeared to be beyond the power of the Indian to detect the peril impending over the camp, his singular withdrawal looked as if something in the nature of a suspicion of danger had entered his mind.

The young officer felt that the signal for assault should have been made at the moment the Apache began falling back. That would have prevented his giving the alarm to his companions, who must have been sleeping as soundly as they would be at any time later.

Had the lieutenant been within easy reach of his captain he would have moved round to him and made known his views, but his superior officer was on the opposite margin of the plateau, and could not be reached in time to render the visit of use.

"It must come in a few minutes," he said to himself; "and even if that Indian suspects the truth it can do him no good."

Within a couple of minutes after the disappearance of the Apache from the front of the officer, his shadow was discerned again, as he whisked before the camp fire. The blaze had not increased, and little more than his leggins were visible, even they vanishing in the shadow a moment after.

The hundred eyes now divided their attention between the dark center of the plateau and the eastern sky, where they longed for the breaking of light, which must soon appear. It seemed strangely delayed, but it could not be far off, even though the gloom rendered it impossible to discern the face of a watch.

From his position behind a boulder Captain Campereaux, crouching behind the surgeon, cautiously ignited a match, shading the little twist of

flame, so that it could not have been seen ten feet away.

"What time is it?" asked the doctor, leaning forward.

"Time for day to break," growled the captain. "I wonder what's the matter with the sun. Is the orb out of order?"

"No; it is growing light; the time has come to start the music."

There was no mistake this time. The jagged rocks, standing out in black relief against the sky, grew darker and more inky as the background began to pale before the advent of dawn.

"Don't you hear some peculiar noise off there to the left?" asked the captain, uneasily, raising his head and peering in the direction named.

"I don't know about that," replied the doctor, equally puzzled, "there has been a slight breeze blowing off and on since we halted, and it may be that; but you are making a mistake, captain, if you delay the attack another minute."

Raising the carbine at his side, Captain Camperaux pointed it toward the middle of the plateau, and pulled the trigger.

It seemed that the single report had hardly

sounded upon the still air when nearly half a hundred followed, accompanied by wild shouts and cries. Having poured in their volley, the soldiers sprang to their feet and rushed down across the slope at the top of their speed straight for the Apache camp.

No time for weak blows now! No quarter for the fiends that had never spared the babe at the mother's breast, nor heeded the prayers of helpless old age. Like the war cry "Remember the Alamo!" which nerved the arms of the Texan patriots at San Jacinto, each soldier felt himself a giant as he dashed down on the savage band.

The run was brief, and in a twinkling the eager horde met at the center. Not a warrior had been seen to leap to his feet, and it looked as if the first volley had been so well directed that not one escaped.

But a cry of rage and dismay went up the next minute, and the soldiers stopped like wild steeds on the brink of a precipice.

"Where are the Apaches?"

The strange question was repeated over and over from husky throats, as the men dashed hither and thither, falling over each other in their mad eager-

ness to find the redskins that had defied them so long.

But, marvelous as it seemed, not a single Apache was in camp. They had disappeared as suddenly as though they never existed.

The mystery was quickly explained. A narrow ravine, not more than a foot deep and wide, evidently the gully worn by some mountain torrent led from the bowlders to the edge of the plateau, within three yards of where Captain Campereaux had been stationed with the surgeon and others on either hand.

The faint noise detected by the captain a little while before was caused by Geronimo and his warriors stealing through this ravine, under the very noses of the troopers.

The feat could never have been performed but for the gloom created by the bank of clouds in front of the moon. Its accomplishment, even under such favoring circumstances, excited the marvel of every member of the dismounted cavalry. It was another proof of the wonderful deftness of those strange people, which, if related on the page of romance, would probably be ridiculed.

But that every one of the band had escaped was

beyond question ; and, so far as could be judged, not one of them had received a scratch.

It would be vain to dwell upon the disappointment of the officers and men. The captain gnawed his grizzly mustache with chagrin, and strode back and forth across the plateau, muttering harsh expressions to himself, refusing to speak to any one, and in such a state of rage that for some time no one dared approach or address him.

It must have been that the noise made by the loosened stone roused the single Apache, who, without suspecting the real cause, rose from his blanket, rekindled the fire, and started out to investigate.

His course in coming to a sudden halt, standing still a few seconds, and then retreating with his face to the foe, left no doubt that he had discovered the peril. His penetrating eyes must have shown him the cap of one of the crouching soldiers, and, making his way noiselessly back to camp, he had awakened Geronimo and the rest. Then the Indians departed in the remarkable manner described.

Could Captain Campereaux have seen the Apache when he halted in front of Lieutenant

Whitcomb, he would have given the signal, and not one of the wretches could have escaped ; but the instance was only one of many in which the marauders seemed doomed beyond all hope, and yet extricated themselves with a skill which defies imitation.



THE FIGURE OF THE SOLITARY INDIAN.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT THE HARLAND RANCH.

IT is a far different scene to which we now introduce the reader, and one that cannot fail to be viewed with greater pleasure, although even this is not without its shadow as well as sunshine.

Only a day's ride from the scene of the fruitless battle in the mountains stood the ranch of Caleb Harland, to which reference has been made in the preceding chapters. Like all such structures, the building was only a single story in height, with a hollow square in the center, upon which each room opened. These included the sleeping rooms, the kitchen, the stable on the further side, and other apartments devoted to various uses.

The theory no doubt is founded on fact that this arrangement secures better ventilation and more coolness than any other that can be adopted.

In this low, wooden building, on a sunshiny day

in October, were the three female members of the household—the aged grandmother, the sturdier wife, and the beautiful, light-hearted daughter, Fanny, who had been such a favorite at West Point only a few months before. Her surroundings were in very striking contrast to those at that lovely spot on the Hudson; but her laugh was as musical, her smile as radiant, and her voice as charming; and she looked as fascinating in her calico suit as when in her spotless white or dazzling silk.

A row of trees surrounded the house on all sides, and, though they were not large, yet the shade was grateful even when the sun abated somewhat its fierce strength. Now that the light midday meal had been finished, and the daily work done, Fanny came forth from within and seated herself on the bench near the front door and close to the archway through which the horsemen rode when returning from their long jaunts. Her mother and grandparent preferred to remain within doors, where the coolness was of the most delightful nature.

It was a custom of the young lady, when she emerged from her home, to cast a long, searching

look across the sandy plain in front, while her mother frequently through the day ascended the roof of the building, and examined every part of the horizon within her field of vision. Her house, unlike the majority of those in the Southwest, was made entirely of wood, instead of adobe, the most common building material throughout Mexico, Arizona, and New Mexico.

News had come to these dwellers in the exposed ranch that Geronimo and his Apaches were on the war-path, and there was no saying when he would pay them a visit.

And so it was the most natural thing in the world for the young girl, before seating herself, to stand for a moment, shading her eyes with her hand, and looking searchingly off to the westward, where the country was in plain view for miles. She had done the same thing many times, without descrying anything strange, but this time she gave a slight start, for the bright eyes had detected something at last.

"I wonder whether they are Apaches," she gasped, her heart throbbing faster than was its wont. "I shall soon know," she added, wheeling on her heel and darting into the house for the glass.

She said nothing of what she had seen to the others, for she had no wish to alarm them without cause. She was back again in a few seconds, and, advancing beyond the line of trees, so as to obtain an unobstructed view, she leveled the glass at the approaching horsemen, too far away to be seen distinctly with the naked, unassisted eye.

A joyous exclamation escaped her.

"They are friends, for they are United States soldiers. I am glad they are going to call, for we shall hear some news."

The regular rising and falling of the riders showed that their steeds were on a gallop, which rapidly lessened the distance between them and the ranch. Before long she was able to make out that there were six, though even with the aid of the glass it was impossible to distinguish their faces clearly.

As they came nearer, Fanny withdrew closer to the house, where naturally enough she glanced down at her dress to make sure she was in presentable form. Nothing seemed wanting, though she smoothed her curly black hair in the vain attempt to subdue some of the obdurate ringlets that clustered about her shapely neck.

She wondered why the young officer at the head of the squad was smiling. Could there be anything in her dress that caused it, she asked herself, blushing and glancing downward at her attire without detecting anything amiss.

On galloped the six troopers, five of them at a respectful distance behind the youthful leader, whose face, like theirs, had become bronzed under the flaming Arizona sun. Ten feet away the officer checked his steed, and, leaving him to the care of those behind him, sprang from the saddle, and walked rapidly toward the astonished lady.

"Miss Harland, you haven't forgotten me?"

"Lieutenant Whitcomb!" exclaimed the delighted girl, "where did you come from?"

"I have been out on a scout with our company, and we are working our way back to Fort Grant, where you may remember I told you, when at the Point, I had orders to report."

"I cannot tell you how pleased I am to see you," said the lady, recovering her composure and speaking nothing but the truth, as she tried to do at all times; "but," she added, "let you and your men put up your horses and come into the house. There! I will listen to no excuse; visitors are too

few and far between for us not to make the most of them."

"There is no resisting such an invitation," said the delighted Dick with a laugh, as he turned to Joggens, Windstrom, and their companions, and directed them to drive through the archway, stable the steeds, give them feed, and then make themselves as much at home as they chose.

By this time Mrs. Harland, hearing voices, had come forth to learn the cause. She was introduced to Lieutenant Dick, who, hat in hand, followed the two into the dwelling, where he shook hands with the elderly lady.

All three of the ladies were refined, and hospitable. It may have been because the lieutenant was so charmed by the winsome Fanny, that he was sure he had never visited so captivating a family. Their affection was apparent in the manner of each, and the callers were made so welcome that they instinctively felt they would not be unwelcome, even if they tarried several days.

Lieutenant Whitcomb gave a hasty sketch of the scout on which he had been engaged, adding that by permission of his captain he had taken several of his men and made a detour for the purpose of

calling at the ranch, though he was under promise to rejoin the command as speedily as possible.

"But where are your father and his men?" he asked, after the conversation had rattled on for some time.

"Father went away two days ago to make arrangements for us to leave this place—at any rate for a time."

"He has become convinced," added the mother, "that it is too dangerous for us to stay here while the trouble with the Apaches lasts."

"He is wise," said Dick, "and he cannot move away too soon. When do you expect his return?"

"It is uncertain. He may not be back within a week, and he may come to-morrow or next day."

"Has he any place in mind?"

"He thinks of moving to San Antonio, Texas, for a while, though he does not mean to visit that place at this time, for it would keep him too long away from us. He has a brother on a large ranch in Western Texas, and he is inclined to go there; but we shall know nothing till he returns."

At this juncture Josh Joggens, who had been

smoking with his friends on the bench outside, presented himself at the door, where he doffed his hat and said :

“I am sorry to interrupt you, but there’s a party of Apaches coming ~~this~~ way.”

CHAPTER XX.

A SURPRISE PARTY.

It was a most unpleasant interruption, when Josh Joggens stepped to the door of the Harland ranch and checked the conversation with the announcement that a party of Apaches were approaching.

The news caused little alarm on the part of any one, for the presence of the troopers rendered the little family secure against two score of the miscreants.

“Confound them!” muttered Lieutenant Dick, springing to his feet; “why couldn’t they have kept away at this time, until I had finished my talk with the folks?”

“How fortunate that you and your friends are with us,” said the venerable grandmother, who was so confident that she remained in her rocking chair while the others ran to the door to survey the strangers.

“It was hardly worth while disturbing the

ladies," said Dick with a laugh, when he observed there were only six of the savages coming toward the ranch, with their ponies on a brisk walk.

"We didn't mane to disturb you," said Winstrom; 'but we thought the news would be interesting; ye can now retire agin with the leddies, and we'll attind to the red gintlemen."

"Where are your men?" asked Dick, turning to Mrs. Harland with the feeling that there was carelessness somewhere, when a party of Apaches could approach the house without hindrance.

"We have three men in our employ, your friend Buck Bragg being one of them, but they are several miles away, attending to the cattle."

"What help would they be to you if we were not here?"

"Don't be alarmed about them," said Mrs. Harland with a smile; "they keep the best lookout possible, but they cannot see the Indians when they come from this direction."

"Why don't they let the cattle go, and stay here, where you see they are needed to protect you from such danger?"

"They never go too far off to be beyond hearing the report of our guns, and the instant they do

that, they make all speed hither ; we can hold any force at bay until they have time to arrive."

"I forgot," said the lieutenant, admiringly, "that Miss Harland told me each of you had a rifle and knew how to use it. I see my mistake and apologize, but it's time we arranged matters."

It is safe to say that there were not many affairs in the Southwest between the Indians and whites in which fortune so specially favored the latter. The troopers equaled the Apaches in number, they were better armed, and were within a strong building, from which they could fire with absolute safety to themselves.

It was evident that the warriors believed the women were entirely alone, since the men kept carefully out of sight. Doubtless some of their number had received hospitality from the ranchmen, and more than likely one or two had been prowling in the vicinity until they learned that Harland was absent, and the three ranchmen were a couple of miles distant looking after the immense herd of cattle. The Indians were justified, therefore, in believing that a more favorable time for attack could not present itself. True, they would

expect some resistance from the women, but they were not afraid of that.

Lieutenant Dick insisted that the females should take no part at all in the impending fight. The front door (there being only one on the outside, the others opening from the square) was hastily closed. So were the few narrow windows, and the building was ready for all and any attacks.

Dick and his friends, carbines in hand, made their way to the roof of the structure, where they lay down, taking care that no one should catch sight of them. A heavy wall of bullet proof planking extended along the edge of the flat roof, having been placed there for the purpose of serving as a screen in just such an emergency as now threatened.

"We'll teach them a lesson," said the lieutenant, "that they won't forget for the rest of their lives. We'll let them come as close as they wish, and when we open on them there mustn't be any shots thrown away."

Joggles, Windstrom, and their companions were in high spirits over the prospect of paying back some of the Apaches in their own coin. Beyond question the warriors were in complete ignorance

of the presence of the troopers at the ranch. If they had had the least suspicion of it, an examination of the footprints of the horses would have put them on their guard.

As the party neared the building they changed from Indian file, so that the half dozen braves were almost abreast, though one near the middle, evidently the leader, was slightly in advance of the others.

Something in the quiet of the house may have struck the red men as ominous, or it may have been due to their cunning that they came to a halt when a hundred feet distant. There was nothing to prevent them from dashing through the archway, and making their assault from the square within; but that would have been rash, before learning something more definite about the situation.

The horsemen had stood motionless but a few seconds, when the leader called out:

“Hooh! hooh! *Bueno die!*”

The last two words were intended as Spanish for “Good day!”

“Keep off!” commanded Lieutenant Dick from his elevated station.

The Apache, recognizing the point whence came the voice, looked up, but all the troopers were beyond sight behind the planking.

The next instant the leader raised his rifle and fired toward the spot. Dick plainly heard the thud of the bullet, as it was imbedded in the plank in front of his face, dangerously near the small hole through which he was peering. But he made no answer.

Then the other warriors emptied their guns in rapid succession, and began spurring their animals on a gallop around the building, speedily coming back to the front and halting as before.

"Lootenant," said Windstrom, "this is a mighty good time for us to fire off our guns."

"Wait a few minutes till I see what they mean to do."

It was clear the Apaches had their thoughts on the archway, but they were not quite ready to dash through it. They must have wondered why the women folks did not reply from some of the windows on the roof of the house. They were anxious to learn what reception they had to count upon in case of attack.

Lieutenant Whitcomb studied the conduct of

the Apaches closely. It suddenly occurred to him that if they should charge through the archway, the quickness of their assault might endanger the females, who were hardly looking for such a demonstration. Indeed, it was apparent that the red men were marshalling for the attempt.

"Captain Campereaux waited only a few minutes too long in attacking Geronimo's camp," said Joggens, who was impatient at the delay.

"Take good aim and fire!" called out Dick.

The six carbines were discharged at the same instant. The result was frightful. Four of the Apaches rolled off their ponies, mortally wounded. Two were struck twice, else every one of the six would have been slain, for not a single trooper missed.

The ponies, freed of their riders, threw up their heads with whinnies of fear, and galloped straight away at the highest bent of their speed. The unharmed couple instantly saw the fatal mistake they had made, and were even ahead of the other horses in skurrying across the dusty plain. As they did so, they flung themselves forward on their steeds, so as to offer the most difficult targets to

the marksmen who had done such terrible execution.

Instantly the six men rose to their feet on the roof, swung their caps, and uttered taunting cries at the two Apaches who, continued riding for life until far beyond rifle range. Finally, they ascended a slight rise in the plain, and disappeared, the other ponies speedily following them.

A few minutes later three new horsemen appeared in a different part of the plain; but a glance at them left no doubt that they were friends. They were, indeed, the three ranchmen, who, having heard the sound of firing from the direction of the building, were coming with all speed to the help of the women folks.

CHAPTER XXI.

GOOD-BYE.

BUCK BRAGG and his companions were hardly less astonished than the Apaches when they reached the ranch and found Lieutenant Whitcomb and his troopers awaiting them, and saw with their own eyes the result of the single volley poured into the marauders.

"That's the way to fight 'em," Buck exclaimed, after shaking hands with the friends, all of whom he had met before; "I'm sorry we couldn't have got on the spot soon enough to wipe out the other two.

"I don't think it likely they will trouble this family soon again; at least not as long as they believe a half dozen cavalry are here," replied Dick.

"I don't know about that," remarked grandmother Harland; "the Apaches are very revengeful."

"But they take no unnecessary risks," observed her daughter-in-law; "there are too many places where they can commit their crimes without running into any such danger as they did here."

"But Lieutenant Whitcomb and his friends cannot stay with us always," suggested Miss Fanny, with flushing cheeks; "though we all wish they could remain until father returns to take us away."

The coast being clear, men and women gathered outside the building, where there was room for all to seat themselves, and the conversation, as may be supposed, was of an animated character.

"Bragg and his companions, I am sure, will be within call," said the lieutenant, who somehow or other managed to secure a seat beside the charming Fanny; "but what has taken place convinces me that you ought to do one thing without delay."

This was addressed to the three ladies, and they and the rest looked inquiringly at the young officer for his explanation.

"You ought to go with us to the fort, and there wait till Mr. Harland comes back. It is unsafe for you to remain even for another day. There are a number of ladies at the post, and you will be as

comfortable as here, while, more important than all, you will be safe."

This proposition was so wise, and there was so little in the way of its accomplishment, that the wonder is it was not instantly accepted; but Dick was astonished to find the opposition it met from those in whose behalf it was made.

Mrs. Harland believed that her husband would return on the morrow, and she could not bear the thought of his finding the building deserted. True, they could leave a note which would explain everything: but if the Apaches were ahead of him, they would fire the structure, destroy the writing, and convince him that his whole family had been slain or carried off. She believed that with the three ranchmen and the same number of ladies, each of whom was armed and knew how to shoot, they could beat off any party of hostiles that were likely to disturb them.

Fanny sided with her parent. Possibly, while she would have been glad of the move which would have allowed her to spend an indefinite time in the society of Dick Whitcomb, yet her maidenly modesty caused her to shrink from the very step she would have liked to take.

It may be, too, that she desired to impress the lieutenant with the fact that she was not afraid to stay, even after he and his troopers departed. The same emotion probably led Buck Bragg to make light of the proposition, which was favored only by the eldest lady. Even she, seeing the general opposition, ceased to urge it upon her friends.

Dick gave a sigh when he realized the failure of his cherished plan.

"It may be you are right," said he, "but I cannot help believing you will regret your decision."

Alas! that his fears should prove so well founded, and within such a brief period of time.

But with the dismissal of the plan the spirits of the company lightened, and the conversation went on as though not a shadow rested upon the threshold. The sight of the four inanimate bodies stretched on the plain so near the house, however, was so distressing to the ladies, that the three ranchmen went out, dug a shallow grave at some distance, and placed them forever beyond the view of men.

"You can stay several days with us?" was the

inquiring remark of Miss Fanny, who still sat at the side of Lieutenant Whitcomb.

"I need not say that we would all be delighted to do so, but Captain Campereaux is a strict disciplinarian, and he would hardly be pleased if I rode back to the fort too late."

"Where is he?"

"He started home by another course, but we shall probably unite before reaching the post, which is a couple of days' ride off."

"Now that you have learned where we live, you will not forget us," said she, with a smile which set Dick's heart a-flutter.

"No danger of my forgetting you, but I hope you will change your home very soon, now that you have decided to await the return of your father."

"Why should you wish that, when it is sure to make the distance between us much greater than now?"

"Because I shall be uneasy as long as I know you are here."

"I am sure you magnify our danger," remarked Fanny, lightly. "We have lived here a number of years, and the Apaches, when on the war-path,

have ridden by our house more than once, but still we are safe."

"Which is no proof that you will remain so."

"What stronger proof can you ask? Wasn't it Patrick Henry that said we had no way of judging the future except by the past?"

"Well," replied Lieutenant Dick, with a faint sigh, "I hope your confidence is not misplaced; but the most gratifying sight that I could see just now would be your father, for I know he would not let you stay here a single hour after we left."

"I am sure no sight could please mother and the rest of us better than that of father, even though he should decide that it was safe to remain right here; but you haven't told me how long you can stay with us."

"We must make a start in the course of an hour or two."

"So soon!" exclaimed Mrs. Harland, who overheard the reply; "surely you can wait until morning."

"We can, of course; but, all things considered, it is best for us to leave this afternoon."

It was one of the most delightful memories of Dick Whitcomb's life—that hour or two he spent

beside Fanny Harland on the rude bench in front of her Arizona home. He and his men were tired from their hard ride, for they had been in the saddle several days, and the rest was grateful. The cooling draught of water from the well within the square, the bright faces, and the cheerfulness that prevailed despite the stirring events of a short time before, could not fail to have their effect on the campaigners, who enjoyed such occasions all too rarely.

The skeleton at the feast was Dick's misgiving as to the immediate future of those ladies. Young as he was, and brief as had been his experience in the Indian country, he knew the frightful ferocity of the Apaches, who had desolated the border so often. While Fanny and her mother thought the fierce reception given the half dozen warriors would act as a deterrent, he could not help thinking it likely to produce the opposite effect, and that the feeling of revenge—one of the most marked characteristics of the American race—would cause them to pay another visit to the ranch within a short time, probably before the return of Caleb Harland, if indeed he ever returned.

However, Dick had done his utmost to persuade

his friends to accompany them to the fort, and he felt a natural dislike to urging them further.

All too soon the hour for departure arrived. The horses had had a good rest and dinner, and, when brought forth, were ready for a long ride. Kind farewells were exchanged, and the six troopers galloped toward the west—the direction whence they had come.

A half mile distant, Lieutenant Dick looked around. The figures in front of the ranch were indistinct, but he was sure that one of them was waving a handkerchief. Raising his glass to his eye, he smiled when he recognized the slender figure of Fanny, who had also her glass in front of her face. His handkerchief was drawn out, the signal exchanged for a minute or two, and then, as he wheeled his horse about, the building vanished from sight forever.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN CAMP.

THE troopers had lingered at the ranch longer than any member of the company suspected. At such times the hours pass swiftly, and when they had ridden some eight or ten miles beyond the slight elevation from which they caught their last sight of the building and its inmates, the sun dipped below the horizon.

It had been Lieutenant Whitcomb's intention to travel considerably further, but, at this juncture, they came upon such a lovely spot for camping, that they decided to stay where they were until morning.

The place was somewhat rocky, with stunted pine and cottonwood growing plentifully, and containing the finest spring of clear water that the young officer had seen since entering the Apache country. It was the last which decided the ques-

tion, though the abundance of a species of short succulent grass, of which the horses were very fond, was not without great value.

"If I had known we were going to make a halt so near the ranch," remarked the lieutenant, after the saddles had been removed, the ponies turned to grass, a small fire started, and everything made snug, "I would have stayed with our friends."

"We could have passed a charming evening there," said Joggens, "and I'm sorry we could not persuade the folks to come with us to the fort."

"You agree, then, that they have made a mistake in staying?" asked Dick, uneasily.

"I'm sorry to say I haven't the least doubt of it."

"And you, Welt?"

The Irishman shook his head.

"Josh and me don't often quarrel, and we ain't agoin' to do the same on this question."

"Why didn't you insist more strongly that they should go?" demanded the lieutenant, who felt half inclined to turn about and ride back to the ranch.

"Both of them did so," said Ray Bedford, "when you were not within hearing, and so did I and Braxton and McGarvey," he added, alluding

to their two companions, who generally had little to say in such matters.

"Buck Bragg and the other two men are as brave as any in the country, but they seem to forget that their house is made of wood, which has been so dried in this furnace-like climate that a match will set it off like paper. I wonder that it has been spared so long."

"Buck is a peculiar fellow," added Joggens. "I am sure he knows we were right in urging him to go, but he feels it would be a reflection on his ability to take care of the females. He reasons that having kept them safe up to this time, he can do so to the end."

"Suppose we had not been there when the Apaches made their attack?" inquired Dick.

"I asked Buck that same question. He answered that the women would have kept them at bay until he and the other two men could have come up, when they would have driven them off."

"It can't be denied that they were promptly on hand; a few minutes sooner and they would have caught the two that rode away."

"The trouble is," added Windstrom, thoughtfully puffing his pipe, "that the spalpeens, having

learned that the folks had friends there, will prowl around to see whin they leave. Then they'll take the chance of finding things in better shape than before, and, whin they sail down again, they won't make any mistake."

"That being the case," said Bedford, "won't they be likely to give some of their attention to *us*?"

"I shouldn't wonder," coolly replied Joggens, "though as they won't catch us asleep, they may give us the go by."

Enough has been said to show that the situation of the troopers, as well as that of the people in the ranch, was serious ; but the horsemen had become inured to danger, and, when they took every precaution against surprise, they simply repeated what had been done every night they had spent on the scout.

They had a day's rations still left, which fact led them to decline the invitation to dine at the ranch. All ate heartily, and the six ponies stationed near were hobbled, to prevent any stampede during the darkness. The fire was kindled in a hollow among the brush and rocks, where it was invisible fifty feet away, and the night had hardly closed in, when two guards were stationed each on an oppo-

site side of the fire, and one fully a couple of rods beyond, where the horses were hobbled.

One of these sentinels was Windstrom, and the other Ray Bedford. They were to keep their places until some time past midnight, and then silently make their way to the camp fire, and awake the lieutenant and McGarvey, who would take their posts until daybreak.

Under such circumstances, the guards could not move back and forth, as when on a regular beat, for the danger was too great; but it was not necessary, for such men are able to keep their senses about them for hours at a time, even when in want of sleep, and there was no fear of their sleeping on their posts.

After Windstrom and Bedford had taken their places, the others reclined on their blankets for a time, talking in low tones, most of them smoking, and more concerned about their friends at the ranch than for themselves.

But, since Dick was to act as sentinel for part of the night, he stretched himself on his blanket, to gain what slumber he could before the hour for him to go on duty. McGarvey had been unconscious some time. Joggens and Braxton, being left

to themselves, were not long in imitating them, so that at a comparatively early hour the only members of the party awake were the sentinels.

These men did their duty well. They could not have been more alert had they known that Geronimo and fifty of his fiercest warriors were prowling near and waiting for them to close their eyes.

The guards, being on opposite sides of the camp, and some distance apart, could not see each other, but they exchanged signals at intervals. These were soft, faint whistles, such as are sometimes heard from the throats of birds in the night, and they were so skillfully disguised that it is doubtful whether they would have been recognized by any hostile ears.

When one of the sentinels emitted that peculiar call and it was answered by the other, it simply meant that everything was well with both of the guards. A failure to reply on the part of either would be cause for alarm.

These interchanges were not interrupted as the night wore on, and the bright moon appeared in the sky. The rising of the orb was so much past midnight that the agreement was that when it appeared Windstrom and Bedford should go off duty,

the lieutenant and McGarvey taking their places. The Irishman waited till some minutes after the moon rose, in order to give full measure. Then he whistled once more to Bedford, who promptly signaled that all was well.

The two did not approach the smoldering fire at the same time, for it was against regulations to leave the camp unprotected, even for two or three minutes. Windstrom came in and touched the shoulder of Lieutenant Dick, who was lying on his side. Instantly his head was raised, and, seeing the dark figure bent over him, he asked in a whisper :

“What is it?”

“Nothing is the matter, but it’s a good time to change the guard if it’s all the same to ye.”

“All right; wake McGarvey, and I’ll go back with you.”

Only a touch was required to rouse the other. Rifle in hand, he instantly made his way to where Bedford signaled him. The two said a few words, and then Bedford stole back to camp, wrapped his blanket around him, and five minutes later was asleep.

Almost the same thing took place with Windstrom, who tarried only long enough to show the

lieutenant where he had passed the dismal hours among the rocks, when he returned to camp, and speedily joined his comrade in the land of dreams.

"I suppose I have from four or five hours to keep guard here," muttered the young officer, who believed in sharing his duties with his men, "and it won't be any trouble to stay awake. I slept most of last night, and have done so well since then that I shall not feel the need of anything more until to-morrow night. The first thing to do is to gain some understanding of my surroundings."

On all sides were the rocks, few of large size, with the stunted trees, which prevented Dick seeing far in any direction. He was in the shadow, but there were patches of moonlight, giving him glimpses of his surroundings, shifting and uncertain, as the moon slowly wore across the zenith. Confident in his own security against discovery, he was equally confident of being able to detect the approach of any stealthy enemy.

The only sound which reached his ear was the soft trickling of the tiny stream from the spring, as it wound its way among the rocks, and was finally swallowed up in the sandy plain which stretched on every hand.

"Everything seems to be all right," was the conclusion of the lieutenant, "but there is no telling how close some of the Apaches are at this very minute. If they only had enough courage to make a sudden charge upon us they might—well, they might render things unpleasant, to say the least."

A half hour had passed, when Dick emitted the same low, tremulous whistle which had been used by Windstrom when in his position.

Instantly the listening ear caught the guarded answer from the other side of the camp. McGarvey was there, on the alert, and had seen nothing as yet to cause alarm.

At such a critical time the sentinel depends upon his ear as much as his eye, but it may be said that every sense is at its highest tension, and it would have been a skillful scout indeed that could have stolen unawares upon that camp in the Arizona solitudes.

The horses had cropped the grass for an hour or two after being hobbled, and were now lying down, as silent as the sleeping troopers, whose breathing was like that of so many children. One of them was heard to move slightly, but the ear of the lieutenant had learned rapidly enough during his short

but eventful experience in the Southwest to understand that it signified nothing, and he gave it no further thought.

Another half hour wore away, and Dick was on the point of uttering his signal, when McGarvey anticipated him. The response was prompt and so far all was well.

Directly eastward was the direction in which lay the ranch where Dick had had such a pleasant call in the afternoon, and where, it may be said, his thoughts lingered with a delight that caused him more than once to smile to himself.

"Strange," he muttered, "what changes take place in this life! It seems impossible that only a little more than three months ago she was one of the most admired belles at the Point, and now she is at home in this wild, dangerous country, as sweet and charming as ever, but in a situation which is more perilous than she imagines.

The youth was silent a few minutes, and then, as if to check his wandering thoughts, he emitted the signal which had already escaped him several times. He listened as before, but to his surprise there came back no answer.

"McGarvey must have heard me," reflected

Dick, with a pang of misgiving immediately repeating the call, louder than before, but still without bringing any response.

“Can it be that he has fallen asleep, or——”

There was but one way to settle the question; that was by investigating for himself, and he set out to do so.

In stealing to the other side of the camp, he passed so near the forms of his sleeping men that he could have touched them. Not one stirred, and, with the utmost caution he crept to the spot where he knew the other sentinel had been placed.

A few rays of moonlight stole through the vegetation, and it was some minutes before he was able to locate McGarvey. Finally he caught the outlines of the familiar figure, sitting just as he himself had been sitting and apparently on the watch.

Without speaking, the lieutenant reached out his hand and squeezed the arm of the man. He made no movement, and, still hoping he was asleep, but fearing the worst, Dick shook his shoulder vigorously.

As he did so, the figure fell back heavily against him, and Lieutenant Whitcomb then knew what he had already suspected. McGarvey was dead.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A PURSUIT AND CAPTURE.

LIEUTENANT WHITCOMB silently cocked his carbine. He did not lose his presence of mind at the discovery that McGarvey, the sentinel, had been slain at his post; but, mindful of danger which threatened the camp, peered searchingly round in the gloom to learn whether the perpetrator of the murder was near him.

A sound like the rustling of a leaf fell upon his ear, and he knew on the instant that one Apache at least was stealing from the spot. He could not see the Indian, however, though he must have been but a few feet away.

Just beyond, where the moonlight fell unobstructed, was a larger rock than the rest. The assassin could have passed round this or avoided it altogether, but for some reason he chose to climb over it. Still stranger, when he was on the very top, he paused, turned about and looked back, as

though undecided whether to leave the spot or not.

In this position he was in plain sight, and Dick noticed that instead of having a rifle he carried a bow and arrows. It was one of the latter missiles he had used, though, if shot from the bow, it was hard to understand why the twang of the string had not been heard in the oppressing stillness.

But that backward look of the Apache was his last. As the report of the lieutenant's carbine rang out on the night, the warrior, with a wild screech, sprang full length from the rock, his arms and legs outstretched, and fell on the other side, with not a spark of life left in his body.

The noise of the gun and the shriek of the Indian instantly roused the sleepers, who rose to a sitting posture and grasped their weapons, peering about in the gloom to learn the cause. All were too wise to leap to their feet, for that might have exposed them to the marauders creeping upon them.

After discharging his weapon, Dick Whitcomb maintained his crouching position behind the boulder, on his guard against a rush of their enemies, who, he was sure, were near at hand. He was in this attitude when Josh Joggens appeared with Windstrom at his heels.

"What's up?" was the cautious inquiry.

"One of the Apaches has killed McGarvey; I caught sight of him before he could get away."

"Where is he?"

"What's left of him is on the other side of the bowlder over there."

"Well," whispered Joggens, "look out for the horses: you and Bedford get out there as quickly as you can, and we'll watch here."

The Irishman turned about without speaking, almost striking Bedford, who followed him to where the horses were hobbled.

Whether it was the report of the gun and the cry of the stricken Apache that had disturbed them, or whether they had received a visit, it could not be known, but the beasts were restless, two or three having risen to their feet, as if trying to get away. In fact, one of them was freed from his hobble, and was making off at the moment the two caught sight of him.

"The Indians have cut the rope!" whispered Bedford; "look out you don't get a shot from them."

"I believe that's me own horse!" exclaimed Windstrom.

The belief that it was his animal that was making off, and that their enemies were the cause of it, roused the Irish blood of the trooper, who, for the moment, threw prudence to the winds and started on a run for the pony.

Had he been given time to approach the animal more deliberately, he would have had no difficulty in recapturing him, but the sight of a man running toward him, and only discernible in the moonlight, startled the steed into a gallop.

The fact angered the trooper still more, and, threatening all sorts of punishment on the brute, he followed him out from among the bowlders on the open plain, where it would seem he had not the least chance of overhauling the exasperating creature.

That their old enemies were near had already been proven in the most shocking manner ; but it must be believed that the action of Windstrom was as much a surprise to them as it was to the friends he left behind. It was contrary to the principles of border warfare, and the very opposite of what might have been looked for on the part of a scout with such an experience as the indignant trooper.

The latter was no more than fairly beyond the camp when he realized his serious mistake—a mistake the more uncalled for since, one of their number being slain, a steed could be spared without inconvenience to the rest.

But, as may be said, the trooper had crossed the Rubicon, and, having set out to recapture his pony, was determined to do so.

On the open plain, where nothing shut out the moonlight, the steed seemed to form an idea of the identity of his pursuer. As he fled on an easy canter, just rapid enough to keep beyond reach of his master, he turned his head first on one side and then the other, as if seeking to make sure of his man.

“Ye sees me and ye knows me,” muttered Walt; “and if ye don’t, I think ye will when I lays hands onto ye.”

It was indeed the pony belonging to the Irishman, and, although he was without saddle or bridle, and with only the strap dangling from his neck, he was too valuable to be lost without a struggle.

There was something ludicrous in the course of the beast. It seemed to take him several minutes to make sure that he was running away from his master. All doubt being removed on that point,

he stopped, looked at him a moment, and then trotted toward him with a neigh of pleasure at the recognition.

Windstrom's anger changed to good will at this evidence of affection on the part of the steed. All his threats of punishment were forgotten, and, when the animal stretched his nose forward he rubbed it, with many words of commendation.

"So the spalpeens scared ye, did they?" he asked, ready to throw his arms around the beautiful, arching neck. "I can't blame ye for laving such oncongenial company, but I'm with ye now, and ye may dismiss all fear."

With the skill of a centaur, the trooper vaulted upon the back of his steed and drew up the strap with which he had been hobbled. It was sufficient, for the intelligent creature understood almost every word said to him. A pressure to the right or left with the thong, one end of which was passed round his neck, was as effective as bridle and bit.

Windstrom was hardly astride of his pony, when he recalled how strange it was that the horse should have broken the hobble. Drawing up the strap, he examined the other end. A glance

showed that instead of having been broken it had been severed by a keen knife.

The discovery, although partly expected, sent a strange thrill through the trooper. The Apaches had appeared on one side of the camp, and stealthily slain the sentinel stationed there, and, at the same time another had cut the hobbling strap of one of the horses. This showed that two at least were concerned. More than likely a half dozen prowlers were near.

Windstrom looked in the direction of the camp, which was fully an eighth of a mile away—so far indeed that he could barely make out the mass of darkness by which to locate it. There was no gleam of the fire, which must have died out altogether.

But explaining the curious situation as best he could, more than one puzzling question remained to be answered.

The Apaches must have seen the trooper's pursuit of his fleeing animal. What better target could they have asked, as he dashed out from among the rocks into the moonlight, and why, then, had their guns remained mute?

His listening ear could catch no sound from the

direction of the camp. Everything, so far as he could determine, was as quiet as the tomb, when it would seem that a most desperate struggle ought to be under way.

“I wonder whether the spalpeens are waiting for me to come back,” muttered Windstrom, as his pony walked slowly forward, “so that they may gobble us all up together.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CLOSE CALL.

IF Walter Windstrom had shown an unusual rashness in his pursuit of his horse, his natural caution returned now that he had secured the valuable animal. Instead of riding back to the camp, where he had left his friends so unceremoniously, he checked his steed while a goodly distance away, and debated what the best course was to pursue.

Nothing would have been more foolhardy, after his experience, than to ride directly back ; and, if the vigilant Apaches expected anything of the kind, they were destined to find their mistake. He had been favored in too marked a degree by fortune to tempt her again.

Nevertheless, he did desire to open communication with his friends, and, above all, to learn the strength of the red skins who had dared to steal so close to camp, when two sentinels were on guard.

He allowed his pony to walk slowly toward the spot, looking sharply to the right and left, and taking every precaution against running into any trap.

That this was wise was speedily proven. Over on his right he detected the unmistakable figures of horses stealing toward him, and a furtive glance to the left revealed the same ominous state of affairs in that direction.

He comprehended what it meant on the instant. The Apaches were trying to surround him, and, had they shown their usual skill, or had the trooper been less watchful, they might have succeeded ; but turning his intelligent and fleet footed animal about, he sent him bounding over the plain like a whirlwind.

At this moment, the Apaches were on two sides. Had he advanced a little further he would have been confronted by others, while the two parties first seen would have closed in behind him, and sealed the doom of the valiant Irishman. But the way was still open to the rear, and thitherward the magnificent steed skurried as if he knew his own life and that of his master were at stake.

The Indians, seeing their design discovered, bent all their energies to closing in upon the fugitive be-

fore he could get beyond their reach. They emitted screeching whoops and began firing their guns, which in the partial gloom could not be well aimed, though Windstrom heard the balls whistling uncomfortably close about his ears. Not only that, but there was a whizz which could not be mistaken as an object sped in front of his face.

"It isn't enough for the spalpeens to shoot guns," he muttered, "but they must use bows and arrers."

As he had done many times before, the fugitive flung himself forward on his horse, so as to offer as little of his body as possible to his enemies.

"Go it, pet!" he called to his animal. "I've never yit seen the Apache animal that could beat you, and this ain't the time whin it will be healthy to have yersilf outrun."

The race was much hotter than a man in Windstrom's situation could desire. It seemed impossible to elude the bullets and arrows that were flying around him, and which must follow him for some time before he could throw enough distance to the rear to carry him out of the range of his pursuers,

But his horse was doing magnificently, and the frequent glances he cast around left no doubt that,

having struck his gait, as may be said, he would soon leave the others hopelessly behind.

Suddenly the steed flung up his head with a peculiar shiver of the body, like an animal when badly stung. The rider suspected what it meant, but inasmuch as the horse increased, rather than diminished his speed, he was hopeful that it was nothing serious.

Quite a ridge obtruded across the course Windstrom was pursuing. He dreaded to ride over the crest, where he would be in plain sight, but as he had no means of knowing how far to the right and left the elevation extended, he did not dare change his course.

"Come, my pet!" he called again, partly straightening up, and giving the steed an affectionate pat; "you haven't much more to do till it will be ended."

Up the slope shot the animal as if fired from a catapult, and Windstrom's heart gave a throb of pride, as he found himself hardly able to catch sight of the Apaches following him with such venomous vigor.

They had been almost as quick as he to descry the obstruction in the path of the fugitive. They must have felt that once safely over that, he was

beyond their reach; for at the moment steed and rider appeared on the crest, in strong relief against the sky, they let drive with every unloaded weapon.

“Hurrah!” called out the delighted trooper, as he was whirled down the declivity on the other side; “we’ve given them the slip, and the spalpeens have learned once more that there isn’t a hoss—”

But just then the pony checked his gait and staggered, as though he had stepped into some hole and hurt his foot. His rider pulled on the strap to check him, but there was no need of that. With a distressing moan he lunged forward, went down on his knees, and rolled on his side so quickly, that the trooper was barely able to save himself from being crushed beneath the body.

“I was afeard ye was hurt,” he said, looking down with a pitying heart upon the faithful animal that had carried him out of death for the last time; “and to think I was cross with ye when ye lift the camp without so much as saying good-bye!”

It occurred to the mourning trooper at this moment that he had much more urgent business than bewailing the loss of a steed to which he was so much attached. There were Apaches on the other

side of the ridge, and they were due in a few moments. Windstrom dropped behind his animal, and, lying down with his gun pointed over the inanimate body, waited to give the red men a suitable reception.

But they did not come. Minute after minute passed, and not a single horseman showed on the top of the ridge, until the trooper knew they would not appear at all.

It was a strange deliverance. The Apaches accepted the vanishment of the horseman over the ridge as his final disappearance from the scene, and withdrew from the pursuit, whereas, had they continued it far enough to look down the other side, they would have seen the hapless situation of the brave fellow, and made short work with him despite his courage and skill.

It would be hard to conceive a closer call. Indeed it was so close that Windstrom dare not remain where he was. With one parting look at what was left of his noble animal, he broke into a rapid run, straight away from the ridge, until, when he looked back, he could see nothing of his horse, and the crest of the elevation was but a thin misty line against the sky.

Then at last he breathed freely, feeling that for the present he had nothing to fear from the Apaches.

But the result of this curious concurrence of events was that the trooper had placed fully a mile between him and his friends, and it was a matter of exceeding delicacy and difficulty to rejoin them on the morrow.

That fact, however, caused him no uneasiness, for he would have been a poor scout if unable to take care of himself when well armed, even though on foot, knowing, as he did, that his enemies were in the neighborhood, but unaware of his precise location.

"The boys will be looking for me in the morning," was the reflection of Windstrom, "and I guess we'll be able to open communication. But Joggens will have the laugh on me, be the powers, and I can't blame him if he does."

It need not be said that the Irishman continued to make the best use of his trained senses, and it was this fact which enabled him, while scanning the horizon, to discern toward the east a peculiar glare, different from that of the moon.

For the moment he forgot everything else, and

stood peering in that direction and wondering what it meant.

“Begorrah!” he whispered, as if afraid of being overheard, “that is toward the ranch; have the Apaches been there, too?”

CHAPTER XXV.

FACING EASTWARD.

MEANWHILE, matters were assuming an interesting form at the camp which Walter Windstrom had left in such a peculiar fashion. The shooting of the Apache on one side, and the flight of the trooper on the other, in pursuit of his fleeing horse, would have thrown a less experienced party into confusion, and invited the very attack that must have been fatal, under such circumstances.

"Did you ever know the like?" was the question of Josh Joggens, when Ray Bedford slipped back to where he and the lieutenant were crouching, and told of Windstrom's performance.

"He will have his hands full to take care of himself," was the comment of Lieutenant Dick, who would have smiled had the situation been less serious. "Bedford, do you and Braxton keep near the horses, and fire the minute you catch sight of an Indian. I think, Josh, they are after the animals, and we had better guard them."

"You are right," assented the scout, and immediately the two slipped over to the other side, where they were close enough to the steeds to frustrate any attempt to run them off.

Not content with that, Joggens stealthily made his way directly among them, in order to forestall any effort to deprive the troopers of such invaluable property. The ponies had become quieted by this time, and a few gentle words from the man caused them to lie down again.

Lieutenant Dick was on nettles, until his faithful scout rejoined him, and reported that everything was right.

"I don't think they will attack us here," he added, assuming his place beside the young leader.

"We are pretty well fortified among the rocks and bowlders, and we can stir them up if they try it," replied Dick.

The four listened intently, but no unusual sound reached their ears. Joggens, however, nestled down from his stooping position, and applied his ear to the ground, where he remained motionless so long that his companions knew he must have detected something.

"It's gone," he remarked, as he came back to his original posture.

"What was it?" asked Dick.

"The sounds were quite distinct, but they grew fainter, and can be heard no longer."

"Did you suspect the cause?"

"They were made by the hoofs of horses. The Apaches must have started in pursuit of Walt, and it will be no easy task for him to escape them."

"If he catches his own animal soon enough he will do so, for there is no fleeter steed in the country."

"It all depends on Walt overhauling his pony in time; when the two got fairly out in the moonlight, where the horse can recognize his master, he will allow himself to be taken."

From this it will be seen that Josh Joggens struck the truth with remarkable exactness, though even he could hardly have forecast the termination of the strange flight and pursuit.

Any one overhearing the remarks made by the four men would have supposed there was little concern or sympathy for the peril of the rash Irishman; but every one was anxious, and could

Windstrom's devoted friend, Josh Joggens, have seen any way in which to help him, he would have rushed forth with the same impetuosity the fellow himself had shown in leaving.

More than one silent tear, too, was shed for the inanimate form that lay so near them. He had died at the post of duty, his fate like that of scores and hundreds of other brave fellows who have given up their lives for their country.

When opportunity was gained for further examination, it was found that McGarvey had been slain by an arrow driven with such force and appalling accuracy that it passed through his heart, the point projecting from beneath his left shoulder. The wretch whose own life paid the penalty of the crime must have stolen fearfully close without discovery, for otherwise the aim could not have been so unerring nor the force so fearful.

"Why did I not hear the snap of the bow string!" asked Dick. "I was listening so intently that I could have caught the falling of a leaf."

"It may seem past belief," replied Joggens, "but through some horrible skill, which I never could understand, an Apache warrior can discharge

an arrow from his bow absolutely without noise at all. I have seen it done, and tried to find out the explanation, but failed."

"Where have you seen it?" asked Lieutenant Dick in some curiosity.

"Three years ago when matters were quiet, I visited most of the Apache towns. Geronimo and I are old acquaintances. While he was specially friendly, he took a bow from the hands of one of his sons, and with a grin said he would show me how to fire it without noise. I placed myself at his side, and may say I never was more astonished in all my life."

"By what?"

"He told me to shut my eyes, and call out when his arrow left the bow. I held my eyes closed until I got tired; when I opened them I asked why he did not shoot. He pointed with a grin to a pine fifty feet off, and there was his arrow buried to the head in the solid wood.

"I then stood near him and watched him closely," added Joggens. "He sent a second shaft after the first with no more noise, and repeated it several times. I looked at his hands, and studied every movement, but could not see the least difference

between his style and that of ordinary archers."

"Did you compliment the old fellow's skill?"

"You may depend upon it I did in the best Apache I could roll off. I said the bow beat the rifle in stealing up to a camp of hostiles, and picking off an enemy without arousing the rest. He grinned more than ever, and gave me to understand that the trick had been used many a time for that very thing. It is no wonder, therefore, that you did not hear any sound, for there was none to hear."

"I must believe your statement, because you make it, though I never heard of anything of the kind before. Possessing such skill, I wonder that the Apaches do not use the bow and arrow altogether, and discard the rifle."

"They do better—they use both."

This conversation was carried on in snatches, with frequent interruptions, caused by the necessity of the speakers keeping their attention upon their surroundings. Finally, it was brought to an end, or rather changed, by the sound of firing a considerable distance away.

"Walt is having a brush with them," remarked Joggens.

"Do you accept the sound of firing as a good or bad sign?"

"It is hard to tell," replied the New Englander. "A man when running away can't see much fun in serving as a target, but," added the philosopher, "I'm inclined to think the firing shows that they fear Walt is getting off—listen!"

The sounds continued but a short time, ceasing when the fugitive whisked over the ridge on his mortally wounded steed, as already described.

There was some expectation that after the pursuers finished their scrimmage with Windstrom, they would return and concentrate upon the small party in camp. It was not likely that the Apaches were numerous enough to divide into two effective parties.

There was no thought of sleep on the part of the four troopers who sat through the darkness, occasionally exchanging a few words, but most of the time listening and watching for the danger which brooded in the air.

With all their desperation the Apaches were circumspect, and they were too wise to attack even such a small number when on guard and prepared for them. Possibly they might have sent in some

shots among the horses, but they chose to refrain for the time.

Once or twice when the scouts peered out on the sandy plain, they caught shadowy glimpses which left no doubt the Indians were there, but they kept so far back that no chance to bring them down could be gained.

"Poor McGarvey was caught foul," said Joggens, addressing Lieutenant Whitcomb, "and they meant to serve you in the same way. You need not be told what would have become of the rest of us."

It was about this time that the whole party noticed the faint glare in the eastern horizon. It was yet too early for daylight, and the true explanation instantly suggested itself to all. The much talked of visit to the ranch had been made by the Apaches. Where an adobe structure might have withstood the torch, the light material of the home of the Harlands had been ignited by the fierce red men, and all had gone up in smoke.

But what of the inmates?

That was the question which presented itself to each, and was discussed in low, frightened voices by the four men, who could see little upon which

to base hope. Joggens convinced his companions that his theory was the most likely. It was that some of the warriors had crept close enough to the building to apply the torch undetected. Then the party, which may not have numbered more than five or six, had withdrawn and calmly awaited developments.

As the men came out they were shot down, while the women, with possibly the exception of the eldest, were taken away as prisoners. Whether they were slain or spared he considered an even chance, for during these terrible times so-called mercy depended on the whim of the dusky leader who might chance to get the upper hand.

Under these trying circumstances, something of the anxiety with which the party waited for day may be understood. Never did the hours pass more wearily. It was more than probable the Apaches were nowhere in the immediate vicinity, but the troopers dared not move, lest they should precipitate an attack at a moment when the chances were much less favorable than while among the rocks.

But all such weary waiting must have an end, and a general sigh of relief went up when the glare

that had died out in the horizon was replaced by such a different tinting that there could be no doubt it was the herald of the rising sun. A lucifer match stealthily lit and held to the face of the lieutenant's watch, showed that it was time for dawn.

It took but a short time after the full breaking of day for the troopers to assure themselves that none of their enemies were near; and, since no glimpse could be caught of them in any direction, the conclusion was natural that they had left the neighborhood altogether.

Before leaving the spot, a sad duty devolved upon the soldiers. The valuables and mementoes were taken from the body of McGarvey, which was then carefully placed among the bowlders, where it could be covered with a large stone so effectively that the remains were in no danger of disturbance from wild animals.

This was the best that could be done, though the project of carrying the body to the fort for military burial was considered.

The mournful ceremonies completed, the troopers ate their rations, filled their canteens from the refreshing spring, mounted their horses, and turned

their faces eastward. All were desirous of returning to the ranch, where it was quite evident stirring events had taken place during the preceding twelve hours. Strict as was Captain Campereaux in the enforcement of orders, he would have pronounced any subordinate derelict who tarried in answering such a pressing call of distress.

Aside from the solicitude of their friends, the troopers were not without considerable misgiving as to Windstrom, of whom nothing had been seen or heard since his abrupt departure hours before.

The fear that the daring Irishman had fallen before the bullets or arrows sent after him, caused Lieutenant Whitcomb and the others to linger some time after the sun had risen, when all four were eager to be on their way to the burned ranch.

"I am afraid this side issue from the captain's party," said the lieutenant, "is doomed to meet with little in the way of success; but, Josh, there seems to be something ahead of us yonder claiming attention."

CHAPTER XXVI.

COMRADES ONCE MORE.

BEING without the restraint which kept his friends among the rocks, Walter Windstrom made such good use of his time that he not only avoided further danger, but was prompt to greet his comrades when the morning was fully come.

Lieutenant Whitcomb had hardly directed the notice of his companions to the new figure, when the latter was seen to raise and swing his hat. That removed all doubt, and the party galloped to meet him as he walked forward from the ridge.

The greeting, as may be supposed, was very cordial, for there was not one of the four who had not felt the most serious misgivings for the safety of the brave but impulsive Irishman. He vaulted into his own saddle, which had been placed on McGarvey's horse, and, as they rode along he gave the particulars of his experience of the night before.

Since these are principally known to the reader, it is not necessary to dwell upon them. Having been saved from the Apaches by an exceedingly narrow chance, Windstrom easily kept out of their way until he saw the troopers close enough to warrant him in going forth to meet them.

It will be remembered that his attention had also been arrested by the light in the east, and he agreed with the others that it boded ill for the ranch, where they should have stayed until morning at least.

"I make no doubt that ye are on yer way back agin," he added as he devoured his share of the morning's rations.

The lieutenant nodded his head to signify that such was his purpose.

"I am glad of the same, though the day bids fair to be hot."

The others had noticed that to which the Irishman alluded. Although they had been favored with comparatively cool weather for the last week or two, yet the pulsating air, the brassy sky and the hot breeze which struck their faces showed that one of those frightful days which welcomed Dick Whitcomb into Arizona was at hand.

The country over which they had ridden the night before, was similar to much that had been met during the scout. Sandy and alkali plains abounded, where the grass was so stunted that one could not help wondering whether a mountain goat, if he lost his way, would be able to secure enough to save himself from starvation.

But for the springs and streams of water encountered here and there, the country would have been the abomination of desolation.

“How any man can deliberately bring his family and settle down here,” said Lieutenant Whitcomb, “passes my comprehension. I would rather live in the Okefinoke Swamp, or the mosquito flats of Jersey, or in the snowy mountains of Montana than to gasp and pant and fight Apaches in this part of the world.”

Joggens smiled, for he knew whither the young officer’s fancies were straying, and he could understand why he was so indignant that a certain person was compelled to cross the continent and settle down in this region, which was anything but a paradise.

“It isn’t exactly what you or I would do, leftenant, but I remember reading in the history of

Iceland, that the geographies in their schools say that they have the most favored climate of any country on the globe. So Caleb Harland holds a good opinion of Arizona, mainly because he has become the owner of a large drove of cattle and is making money."

The way became so sandy that despite the haste the company were in, they brought their animals down to a walk, and by and by reached the top of a slightly rising ground, from which they took a careful survey of the surrounding country.

Sand, sage brush and desolation in every direction. Wherever the eye was turned, it noted the quivering pulsations of the air above the ground which told of the fervid heat that had returned to plague the settler and soldier.

And yet the landscape was not lacking in a certain variety and picturesqueness. There were depressions and risings in the plain, clumps of bushes and vegetation, piles of bowlders, and here and there the tiresome grayish yellow which told of the long continued and withering heat, was relieved by a streak of green, so bright and refreshing that it was evident the vegetation was moistened by some spring or stream.

And beyond this plain were the misty outlines of the mountains near the ranch of Caleb Harland. Were the squad of cavalry likely ever to forget those mountains? Was it not among their canyons and gorges and chasms that they ran Geronimo and his party to earth? Did they not surround the great chief and then, when sure of exterminating him, awake to the fact that he had slipped like an eel from the grasp of the chagrined and exasperated Captain Campereaux and his men?

No; our friends were not likely to forget their experience in that mountain spur, nor the enjoyment that was theirs when, bidding good-bye to the captain and the main party for a time, they diverged to make a call at the Harland ranch.

"It will always be a source of regret that I did not stay in the house last night," said Dick, bringing his glass to his eyes and looking longingly to the eastward. The others used their glasses in the same manner.

"There it is!" said Bedford, as if speaking to himself.

"Yes," replied Joggens, "it's there; do you notice it, leftenant?"

"It is plain enough to the naked eye."

Apparently at the very base of the mountains, a faint pencil of smoke was observed. It did not sway from side to side, or take any of the peculiar motions which it would have shown had it been a signal smoke of Indians or hunters. On the contrary, it was stationary as if it were a stain left by some giant brush swept upward from the horizon.

An inexperienced eye, even with the aid of an instrument, would have seen nothing significant in the sight ; but as the reader will understand it had a world of meaning to the five men who were scrutinizing it through their glasses. Even without the knowledge of what had taken place the night before, they would have guessed that the vapor marked the site of a burned building.

Controlling his emotion as best he could, Lieutenant Whitcomb remarked, as he lowered his glass :

“Beyond all question Harland’s ranch was burned last night.”

“That’s as clear as if we stood by and saw it,” added Joggens.

“I’m thinking,” said Windstrom thoughtfully, “that from the devilment that has been going on

lately, Geronimo has got more warriors with him than we belaved."

"He hadn't many when he left the reservation," put in Braxton, "as we all know, but the worst Indians of San Carlos have been stealing off to join him."

"It must be so," added Bedford, "for they had enough of them to destroy Harland's ranch and at the same time to give us all we wanted to do among the bowlders."

"I don't believe the captain will get back to the fort without another brush with Geronimo, but I don't see much chance of ever driving that scamp into a corner. We shall have to negotiate with him before we can wind up the war."

But time was precious, and, nodding to his companions, the lieutenant started down the slope, the horses all turned toward the point where the pencil of smoke stood out in such bold relief against the sky.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A STRANGE AMBUSH.

AS nearly as could be judged a ride of seven or eight miles was necessary to reach the ruins of the burned building in which the interest of the horsemen lay.

The same alkali plain stretched out in front of them, while the eye was continually offended by the sage brush, withered grass and parched vegetation on every side.

"I rode across this plain last summer," said Joggens, "when the thermomter stood at one hundred and twenty in the shade."

"How did you stand it?" asked Dick; "I had it bad enough in the stage, but there was a roof over my head, while you must have been unprotected from its rays."

"I can hardly understand how it was myself," answered Joggens, with a smile, "for I didn't seem to feel the heat any more than I do this minute."

"Lieutenant Kirkland told me that the metal work of the carbines sometimes became so hot that the men could not handle them."

"He was right—was the same," commented Windstrom, "but we got used to the weather as an eel gets use to being skinned."

Enough has been already learned by the reader to render it unnecessary to say that, as the party progressed across this sandy plain, they were incessantly on the watch for their enemies. While it had been proven that the Apaches knew of the movements of the small squad of cavalry, the red-skins were no doubt shrewd enough to believe the smoke of the burning building would bring the troopers back.

It was these horsemen that had administered such a blistering repulse to the warriors that attacked the ranch the day before, and they would neglect no chance to square accounts with them. Revenge, as has been said, is one of the most powerful motives that governs the conduct of the American Indian.

The keen eyes that roamed over the sandy plain seemed not to miss anything, no matter how slight. Lieutenant Dick directed the attention of Joggens

to a peculiar twist of yellow grass, which looked as if it had been partly pulled up, and then abandoned for something else.

The tuft was so far to the left that he did not suppose it had been noticed by the New Englander, but the latter was on the very point of referring to it, while in fact Windstrom did do so, before Josh could point it out.

This will show how closely the alkali was scrutinized, and, when it was said that not one of the party saw anything of animal life, it will be taken for granted that it had no existence. Yet it was there all the same.

The horsemen rode comfortably close, there being only a few feet separating each steed from its neighbor. This allowed free converse. Joggens and Windstrom each lit his brierwood pipe, and the vapor, lazily puffed, rose above their heads, as thin and blue as that which marked the upper limits of the smoke of the burned home in front of them.

"Don't forget," said the lieutenant, "that if Geronimo or any of his gang are near, they are on the watch. We will make a sharp turn a little further on to avoid an ambush."

The remark would have amazed any hearer not accustomed to campaigning against the Apaches; but the others made no answer, for they knew the danger of such an ambush, even while riding across a dusty plain where nothing but stunted grass was growing.

It was not less than ten minutes after this remark that Joggens, who was riding on the extrême left, saw something which startled him. A hundred yards in advance, and almost in the line of direction they were following, he observed the slightest possible agitation in the sand. It was so slight indeed that he would not have seen it at all, had he not happened to look at the very spot where it appeared. It was as if a rabbit had flirted his head in the dirt which covered his body, or perhaps a coiled rattlesnake had slightly untwisted himself.

“*St!*” hissed the New Englander, uttering the sibilant signal that was recognized by his comrades.

On the instant every one turned to him for an explanation.

“Just ahead and a little to the left,” he said, in a low voice.

As he spoke, every eye was turned in that direction, and the yellow, burning sand was scrutinized with the closest attention. Since there could be little doubt that some kind of danger threatened, the horses were brought to a standstill.

Apparently the plain in front of them had not been disturbed except by winds and storms for years. There were the little rifts and hillocks into which the sand had been blown by the strong gales that sometimes sweep over every portion of Arizona, but there was nothing more.

That is, there seemed to be nothing more; but Joggens, who had never once removed his eyes from the spot where he had observed the curious agitation, saw what seemed to be the end of a stick, projecting a few inches from the sand. At the same time he noticed that back of this object for several feet the dirt was almost imperceptibly rounded, as though a mound or grave had been nearly leveled by the weather.

Beside that, the careful scrutiny revealed that the ground around the place was marked in the same manner. The hillocks were unmistakably, though faintly, defined.

"Boys," he whispered, "it's an ambush! The Apaches are out there!"

The others had discovered the fact at the same moment.

"Wheel to the right!" ordered the lieutenant; "quick! they will fire!"

At such times the officer did not pause to give his military commands as he had learned them at the Academy, but his meaning was understood just as readily.

The five moved simultaneously, turning with military regularity. At the same time they threw themselves to one side of their ponies, to escape, if possible, the volley that was sure to come within the next ten seconds.

Had not Josh Joggens glanced at that particular spot where the slight disturbance occurred, just at the moment he did, every soldier would have been slain.

The ponies responded quickly to the spur and rein, but they had hardly begun the evolution, when a number of rifles broke the stillness, and spouts of fire burst from the sand on their left. At the same moment, as many Apaches, their bodies dripping with dirt of the same color as themselves,

bounded to their feet with yells, and rushed toward the horsemen.

It was a singular sight, that of six or seven Apaches on foot charging upon five cavalymen, whose excuse for such an abrupt flight was that they of necessity were unaware of the strength of the ambuscade.

But these Apaches are terrible fighters and know how to make the best use of their rifles. The whites leaned far away from them, thus imitating to some extent the tactics of the red men themselves when engaged in sharp conflict; but Braxton's pony received such a severe wound, that with a whinny of pain he fell to his knees and rolled over, the rider saving himself only by his fine horsemanship from being crushed beneath his body.

But Braxton was now on foot, and the shrieking Apaches were within arm's length before he could draw his revolver.

None of the other animals or riders had been hurt, and Lieutenant Whitcomb, quick to see the peril of their comrade, shouted to the others to rally to his defence. There was no need for the call, since the movement was instinctively made by all.

When engaged on such scouting raids, the cavalry were provided mostly with carbines and revolvers, since it had been proved that they were the most useful weapons. The Apaches had rifles, and it was only now and then that one of them was met with armed with a pistol.

The foremost warrior paused ten feet off, and brought his Winchester to his shoulder, but before he could take any kind of aim, Braxton let fly with his revolver. Lieutenant Whitcomb discharged his gun at the same time at the miscreant, who flung his arms aloft with a ringing shriek, and went over backward. It was, therefore, uncertain which shot slew the fierce savage; probably both had a part in his taking off.

Instantly every Apache and soldier seemed to be popping his gun at the same time, and the running, riding, circling and dodging hither and thither were of the most bewildering character. The aim of the mounted soldiers was primarily to save Braxton, who being dismounted was in great peril.

But no one could have been cooler than the endangered soldier himself. He slowly fell back, holding his extended pistol in his right hand and

aiming and firing as the necessity arose. His gun was grasped in his left hand, to be brought into play when his Smith & Wesson should be emptied of its charges.

The main difficulty, as will readily be seen, was that the dismounted cavalryman could not keep his foes in front. Turn as quickly as he might, he was unable to guard every point. It was this fact which made it necessary to have the help of his comrades to extricate him from the fearful danger in which he stood.

The dexterity displayed by the Apaches was almost incredible. More than once it seemed to a horseman that when he aimed his rifle or pistol at one and pulled the trigger, the savage was in front of him, and yet the instant the discharge took place, he dodged out of range. They ducked their heads and whisked under the horses' bellies; they darted between their legs; they appeared in one spot, and the same instant were at another, and all the time they kept up such a wild whooping and screeching that the ponies, accustomed to such experiences though they were, became partly panic stricken, so that it was difficult to keep them at their work.

Windstrom saw a second Apache suddenly dart behind Braxton, and like a flash fired his pistol at him. Indeed he fired a little too quickly, for there was no evidence that he so much as wounded the foe, who whipped out his knife and gave Braxton a treacherous thrust.

Josh Joggens detected the movement at the same instant, and, having emptied his revolver, spurred his pony at the warrior, with the intention of riding him down before the blow could be delivered. Apparently there was no reason why this should not have been done, but with a quickness that mystified even Joggens, the fellow dodged just enough to one side to escape, while the horseman had to make a quick turn to avoid trampling on the body of Braxton as the latter fell to the earth.

"I'll finish you any way!" muttered the New Englander, with set teeth, wheeling his horse and making for the savage, who, seeing the nature of the new peril, gave his whole attention to meeting it.

His position was such that Joggens was sure he had him this time beyond possibility of escape; but at the moment the pony leaped, as it seemed,

directly upon him, and the warrior faced and made a forward bound like a diver plunging off the dock.

That plunge carried him directly between the forelegs of the pony, and, as he whisked from beneath the belly, he gave a prick with his knife, which brought such a terrific leap on the part of the animal, that the rider was flung to the ground. It was at this juncture that Dick recognized the Apache as the identical interpreter who had given a very similar performance some weeks before.

The Indian would have made the wound of the pony a fatal one had he dared to pause long enough to do so, but he scored his point as it was.

Joggens and this particular savage were on their feet confronting each other, and neither had any charge in his weapon. The warrior held a long, formidable hunting-knife in his right hand, while Joggens had nothing of the sort about him. It looked, therefore, as if the advantage was with the Apache.

But the lank New Englander had faced such tigers before, and he was not terrified. Probably there was no more skillful sparrer in the Southwest than he. He had been a successful teacher

of the art, and he now fell back on his knowledge.

Gun and pistol had been flung aside, and, with his arms free, Joggens threw himself like a flash into the most approved posture of defense. His left arm was extended, while the other was poised just in front of his breast ready to parry any blow.

The Apache saw enough to learn that neither of the white man's hands held any kind of weapon, while he himself grasped a most effective one. That was sufficient, and running nimbly forward, he struck a vicious blow at the breast of the antagonist. Joggens did not attempt to parry the stroke, since he would have been likely to receive a hurt, but he leaped just far enough back to avoid the weapon, which cleft the empty air in front of his face.

Enough has been said to prove the agility of the red man. Doubtless with training he would have been a skillful boxer, but it had not been his fortune to receive such training, and, as a consequence, he could not know enough to seize the advantage that would have been apparent to a skillful pugilist.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CLOSE QUARTERS.

JOSH JOGGENS now had the Apache just where he wanted him.

The power of the Indian's own blow had thrown him far enough forward to bring him in exact range for the cross counter of the tremendous right arm, which went forward like lightning, and with the force of a piston rod.

It landed, too, precisely where it was intended. Striking the Apache, a little in front of and below the arm, it sent him spinning a dozen feet. Then he stopped, because his heels encountered something which checked him, and he lay as though his neck was broken.

From the fact that such an affray could take place without interruption, though the time occupied was very brief, it will be understood that matters were going on at a lively rate in other quarters.

Indeed, there was not a member of the squad

who did not find he had his hands full, for, as has been shown, the Apaches are furious fighters when they brace themselves for the work for which they seem to believe they are born.

Having delivered his blow so effectively, Joggens paused for a few seconds, expecting his antagonist would bound to his feet like a rubber ball and make for him again. But he did not move, and the soldier thought he might give his attention elsewhere.

Walter Windstrom was acting as though the duty of vanquishing the whole Apache company rested on his shoulders. It was as impossible for him to keep his mouth closed during those thrilling moments as it was for the red men themselves. His ringing shouts were heard continually amid the cracking of rifle and pistol and the whooping of the enemy.

“Hit a head wheriver ye see it! Ah, that was well done, leftenant! But ye know how to strike an ilegant blow, Mr. Joggens! I couldn’t do better mesilf than——”

Just then Walter saw the Apache, who appeared to be the leader of the company, bounding toward him. The soldier had made for another warrior

but a moment before, but the savage eluded him with striking skill, and he was delighted to find one who was willing to stand his ground long enough for a fair bout.

It was no time for chivalry. The Indians are the last people in the world to be accused of mercy, and in fighting them the white man rarely succeeds except by following aboriginal tactics.

The savage who leaped toward Windstrom held his gun in his right hand, while his left was free. The space to pass in order to reach the horseman was so slight that it looked as if he had no intention of bringing his rifle into use.

But it wasn't safe to count upon that, and, without a moment's hesitation, Windstrom threw up his own gun and pulled the trigger.

"Bad luck to it!" he muttered, as he impatiently flung the weapon to the ground; "I forgot it wasn't loaded."

His revolver remained, but he recalled the fact that the chambers of that were also empty.

Stopping like a flash, he did the very thing that was to be dreaded; his gun was brought to a level to shoot the cavalryman from his horse.

While the other was in the act of aiming, the

white man drew back his right arm and flung his pistol with might and main straight at the face of the warrior. The act took place so quickly that with all the Indian's dexterity he could not fully dodge it. Although the missile did not strike him fairly yet he was staggered by the blow and carried almost off his feet.

He instantly recovered himself, however, his breast aflame with rage; but short as was the respite it permitted Windstrom to leap from his horse and spring upon the foe ere his weapon could be brought to a level again.

The situation of the white man was quite similar to that of his friend Joggens, engaged in his desperate tussle at the same moment, but the manner of procedure was different. Instead of standing off and managing the bout on scientific principles, the impatient aggressor sprang at his man with the purpose of winding up the business in rough and tumble fashion. This was in accordance with Windstrom's inclinations. Like those of the people from whom he was descended, he enjoyed such a contest too keenly to keep cool.

In a struggle of that kind the Apache stood him in better play than did that of the antagonist of

Joggens. Concentrating his strength in his good right arm, Walter aimed a blow which, had it landed, it is safe to say would have been all that was necessary; but the Indian dodged it cleverly, and the impetus carried the soldier several paces forward.

But he was quick to rally and face the warrior, who did not hesitate to become the aggressor. In those few seconds he had managed to draw an ugly knife, discarding his gun, and he came like a hurricane for the white man.

The latter was one of those fighters who are prompt to learn the tactics of their foes, and he braced himself for the charge, confident of striking a blow that would lay out the other. It was at this juncture that the Apache gave a display of inimitable quickness and cunning.

Windstrom was as deliberate as it was possible for such a person to be, and he knew when the face of his foe reached the point where it would receive the full force of the sledge-hammer blow he was waiting to deliver. It could not have been more than a few inches from the critical point, and the soldier was in the very act of launching the stroke, when his assailant dropped his head, leaped aside

and shot past him, making a venomous thrust with his knife as he whizzed by.

It would be hard to explain why the blow failed to accomplish its purpose, for, despite its remarkable celerity, there was a certain deliberation in the act itself; but, as it was, Walter Windstrom in all his varied career never had a "closer call."

The knife grazed his cheek, abrading the skin and leaving a mark which he carried several days. He felt the wind caused by the lightning-like sweep of the hand, but ere he could counter or return the blow his antagonist was beyond reach.

It may have been that the Apache decided that the white man was too slippery a customer for him to deal with, for after shooting past him, he did not return and renew the attack, as Windstrom expected.

Only a few paces off, Josh Joggens, having laid his enemy low, was standing in the posture of defense, waiting a few seconds to see whether the warrior would rise to renew the attack. The charge of the Apache past Windstrom carried him so close to the New Englander that, scarcely checking his speed, he swerved to the right, and still clasping his frightful knife, made for him,

evidently of the belief that in a business of that kind, one white man would serve his purpose as well as another.

“Look out, Joggens!” shouted Windstrom, alarmed for his friend, who seemed unconscious of his danger; “turn your head this way!”

The imperiled individual looked about like a flash, but his new assailant was too close for the New Englander to prepare for him. A second more and he would have met him with a blow similar to that used a minute before, but he was deprived of the opportunity.

Josh Joggens, however, was not the man to stand idle or succumb tamely, when a foe was rushing upon him like a runaway engine. Nevertheless, Windstrom, fearful that his friend could not save himself, made a frantic dash to do something if possible for the man who had periled his life many a time for him, and for whom he was now eager to risk his own.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SIGNAL FIRE.

It must be borne in mind that everything went with a hurricane rush, and that the desperate fight between the ambushed cavalrymen and Geronimo's Apaches was over before a spectator would have thought it fairly begun.

The warrior who made such a vicious blow at Windstrom as he dashed past, swerved and headed for Joggens, who had no time to prepare himself to give him proper reception, though he darted to one side and gathered himself together with surprising quickness.

It may have been that the failure of the Apache to deliver an effective blow in the case of his first antagonist gave him distrust of his ability to do better with the second; for, at the moment he ought to have struck, he swerved again, and, without diminishing his speed in the least, shot seemingly under the very arm of the astonished New

Englander, and was well beyond him before the latter, with all his cleverness, could touch him.

"Now I'm ready!" muttered Joggens, facing toward the wily redskin, whom he expected instantly to return.

But the Apache was still running like a deer, straight away from the party. Before the cavalryman could understand the meaning of the maneuver, he was a hundred yards distant, and still going at a speed which no horse in the party could surpass in the yielding sand.

"By the mischief! but he doesn't mean to come back at all!" shouted Walter Windstrom.

"Drop, every one of you!"

The order was uttered by Lieutenant Whitcomb, and was obeyed without a second's pause. Every soldier was on his face in the sand in a twinkling.

The Apaches had enough. Many a time had those fearful warriors defeated an equal and sometimes a superior number of white men, and it is well known that the band with which Geronimo defied the military authorities was but a fraction of the forces that hunted him so long in vain.

In the instance, however, which we are describing, seven of the best Apaches gave up the task of

exterminating five United States soldiers. Death and wounds had resulted on both sides, when the red men withdrew from the fight with scarcely less precipitancy than that with which they had entered it.

It would be hard to describe or understand precisely how this was done. The struggle seemed to be at its height, when it ceased suddenly, and the whites, who glanced around for foes to fight, found none within reach. They had made a dash in different directions, and, by the time the thing was understood, they dropped in the sand, where it was almost impossible to draw bead on them, but from which position they could fire with fatal accuracy at their enemies.

It was at this moment that the lieutenant gave the order for his men to imitate the tactics of the Apaches, and they obeyed so readily that it looked as if each had been brought down by a fatal wound.

The white men had not spent months, and in some cases years, in campaigning against the Apaches without learning much. Now that every one was stretched out in the sand, which felt hot enough to roast eggs, they were as favorably placed as their foes. The latter would have given their

attention to picking off the horses of the cavalrymen, had they not been deterred by two strong reasons.

Anticipating such a catastrophe, the order was given for the animals to lie down, and they complied so promptly that it is not difficult to believe they knew in a certain way the need for such action.

Still they were exposed to some extent, and one of the Apaches, lying on his face a hundred yards off, attempted to draw bead on Lieutenant Whitcomb's horse. In his eagerness, his frowsy head was raised above the ground, so that the lieutenant had a fair sight of the broad, hideous countenance, with its dangling black hair.

Heedless of his own risk, the young officer raised himself, so as partly to be supported on one elbow, and perforated the bronzed skull before the Apache could complete his aim.

This emphatic nipping in the bud of the red man's scheme confirmed the rest in the belief that they had undertaken a contract in which they could not deliver the goods.

For a full hour, with the intolerable sun beating down on man and horse, the cavalry kept their

places in the sand, scarcely moving, but on the alert for any trick of their cunning foes. Few shots were discharged, and those that were fired were mostly at a venture, resulting, as far as could be learned, in no execution on either side.

The soldiers continually spoke in low tones, and exchanged their opinions of the situation. Since it was apparent that the Apaches were withdrawing, Lieutenant Whitcomb depended on Windstrom and Joggens to let him know when they were really gone.

Finally these two, who for some time exposed themselves in what appeared to be a reckless way, sprang to their feet, bringing their horses with them.

"They're gone!" was the exclamation of the New Englander.

Look in whatsoever direction they chose, nothing was to be seen of the red men. True, they might have been crouching in the sand, as when they laid their ambush, but the fact that no rifle shot came from any point was proof enough to satisfy the troopers that all danger was past, for the present at least.

Several of the assailants had been slain, though

their bodies were nowhere in sight, while poor Braxton was killed at the very opening of the fight. All the rest, except Joggens, had been scratched, and their clothing pierced by bullets, while the escape of all was remarkable.

Braxton's pony had also succumbed, and the wonder was that some of the other animals were not shot. As it was, Lieutenant Whitcomb felt that they had been fortunate, despite the loss of such a gallant soldier as Walter Braxton.

Convinced that the danger was over for the time, the soldiers acted promptly. The saddle, bridle and equipments of the fallen man were removed and distributed among the survivors, and the body itself was laid across the horse ridden by Ray Bedford. Then the mournful procession took its way toward the structure from which the thin blue smoke was still ascending, though the fire must have taken place many hours before.

Lieutenant Whitcomb, as indeed was the case with all his companions, was on the alert, for in their situation danger was literally in the air and impended all the time. The Apaches had learned of their presence, and would put forth every exer-

tion to cut off the scouts before they could rejoin their command.

Nothing was more certain than that Geronimo himself was in the mountains at no great distance, gathering his fierce Apaches around him, and preparing for one of those cyclone-like raids in which he spread death, terror and destruction through the Southwest.

The keen eyes of the lieutenant saw no Indians on the plain to the rear, nor indeed in any direction. Looking toward the ruins of the structure in front, all signs of life were lacking, but, about a mile to the north and at the base of the first rise of the range, he made out a column of smoke, no broader than his hand, which, instead of ascending in a direct line, took a spiral course, such as it never could have assumed of its own accord.

The inference was unavoidable. This was the signal fire of Geronimo or some of his followers.

"I would give a good deal," remarked the lieutenant, discussing the matter with his companions, "if I could read its meaning, but it speaks a language beyond my comprehension."

"No one can make it out but those for whose eyes it is intended," said Joggens, "and *they* will read it readily enough."

CHAPTER XXX.

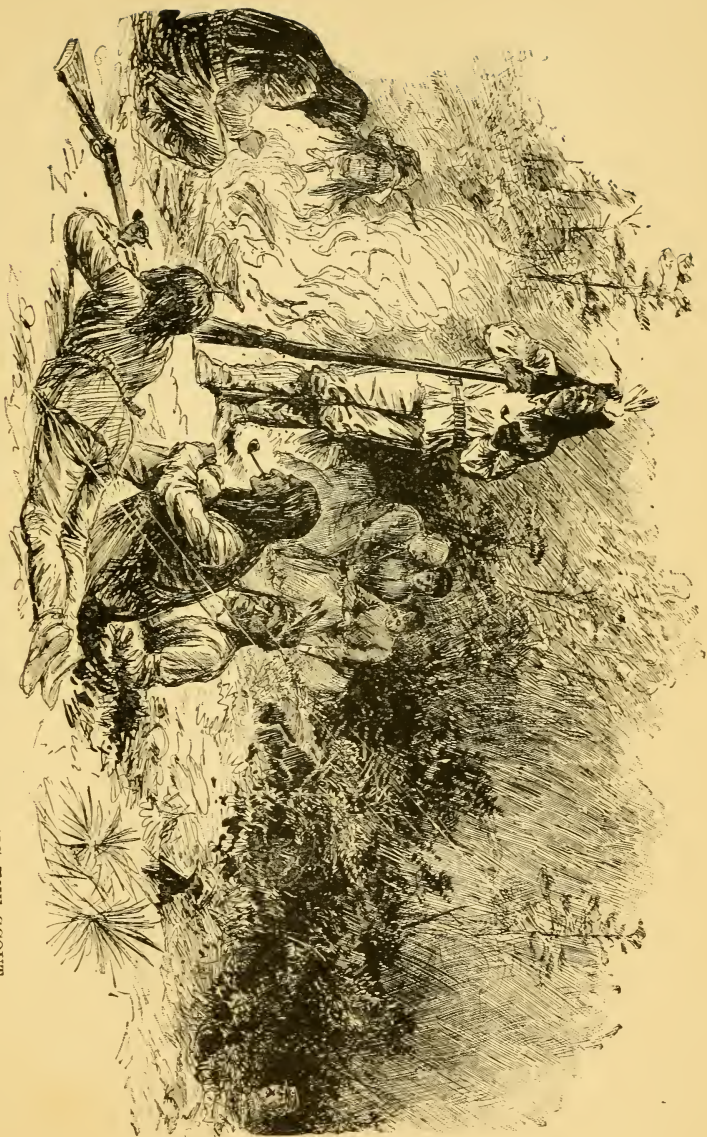
AT THE BURNED RANCH.

THE burned buildings have already been sufficiently described to the reader. Had the structure been composed of adobe, the usual material, it would have been fireproof against the most ingenious and persistent attempts of the Apaches.

The very results that had been dreaded by the troopers had been brought about. The redskins must have been so incensed by their fierce reception, when they attacked the building, that they immediately set to work to form plans for revenging themselves. They were prowling in the neighborhood when the horsemen rode off to the westward, and they followed them so cautiously that the troopers suspected nothing of it. While this party of Indians used great skill and came near destroying the few troopers, another division gave their attention to Caleb Harland's home.

From facts afterwards brought to light, it was

GEORGETO STOOD ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FIRE, EXACTLY FACING THE SCOUT.



learned that the second company of Apaches was led by Geronimo himself. After his exceedingly clever escape from Captain Campereaux, he followed and watched the troopers, as they withdrew in the direction of Fort Grant. Several attempts of the dusky leader to entrap the whites were defeated, and finally he switched off to make a visit to the Harland ranch.

It has been stated that it was a cause for the keenest regret on the part of Lieutenant Whitcomb and his comrades that they did not stay at the latter place over night; but it may be doubted, after all, whether their presence would have availed to save the women, though it would have rendered the struggle more desperate. The Apaches managed, with little trouble, to apply the torch, after which they had only to stand back in the gloom and use their pleasure, as their victims came within reach.

Buck Bragg and the two cattlemen had been slain, as was proven by the discovery of their remains near the ruins. The absence of anything else of that nature showed that the females had been carried off prisoners. Geronimo recognized the fact that they were much more valuable to him alive than dead.

With the aid of one or two half burned shovels, a broad, shallow grave was dug, in which the charred bodies of the unfortunate men and that of Walter Braxton were placed and reverently covered with earth. Before doing so, Lieutenant Whitcomb took charge of the effects of his comrade. Among them were the photographs of a mother and sisters who would look longingly, but in vain, for the coming of the merry hearted soldier boy, who left them in such high spirits hoping to return winning honor and glory. There were some letters, too, from a "nearer and dearer one," who would mourn for the handsome lover, sleeping his last sleep on the arid plains of Arizona. All these were tenderly placed among the treasures which the young officer took with him, to be sent East to the broken hearted ones, when he should reach a point whence this could be done.

These affecting duties could not divert the soldiers from the danger that was ever present with them. Windstrom had stolen away in one direction and Joggens in another, leaving to Bedford and the lieutenant the task which has been named. When it was finished and the day was drawing to a close, they came back with word

that they had detected no signs of their enemies in the neighborhood, though all were convinced they could not be far away.

Along the base of this mountain spur the grass and vegetation grew more luxuriantly, and here and there were tiny streams of water, some of which, issuing from beneath the rocks, flowed out on the sandy plain, gradually diminishing in volume until swallowed up in the quenchless sand.

The increased vegetation and moisture extending for many miles produced such excellent grazing ground for the cattle of Caleb Harland that the explanation can be found why he was so loath to leave the place for one less favored by nature.

The wearied horses made good use of the respite. They drank from the purling streams and cropped their fill of the succulent grass that grew abundantly around them. The sun was still well up in the sky when the four comrades gathered at the base of a towering rock, some distance from the smoking ruins. The position was carefully chosen and was believed to be safe against surprise from the Apaches. The ponies were cropping the grass near. No Indian scout could come within gunshot of the men without passing close

to the animals, who could be relied on to give notice of their approach.

Our friends, therefore, felt tolerably secure while holding a brief consultation as to the best course to follow.

"We have found out considerable," said the lieutenant; "but, after all, I do not see that it avails much. The Apaches are all around us and in such numbers, too, that we can make no effective pursuit. It will be *we* who escape from *them*, if escape we do, instead of them escaping from us."

"But I'm thinking," remarked Windstrom, "that Captain Campereaux can't be so very far away."

"Have you been watching for a signal from him?" asked Joggens.

"You may depend I did not forget to do so."

"What sort of signal did you expect?" asked Bedford.

"The captain and I agreed that if either caught sight of the other, he would try a little of the Apache business. He would use a blanket and thick smoke, or give the column of vapor a wavy motion."

“Like that which we noticed when approaching this spot?”

Lieutenant Whitcomb uttered an exclamation and almost leaped to his feet.

“Was there ever such stupidity? It never once occurred to me: who knows but *that* signal was from the captain?”

It was a strange piece of forgetfulness indeed on the part of the leader of the scouts that, while studying the peculiar signal described, he did not think it might be made by a friend instead of an enemy; but such was the fact.

“It was about two miles to the northward,” he added, “and, if it *was* the captain, he will send some of the troopers in this direction to communicate with us; they may be on their way now,” he added, looking sharply to his right, as if he expected the appearance of one of his own race.

But nothing of the kind was seen, and he settled back in his lounging posture on the ground and smoked his cheroot with tenfold the enjoyment it had afforded when out on the burning plain.

“I do hope it is the captain and the boys,” he added, a minute later, “for it will give us a chance to look after those poor women.”

This was the first reference to a scheme that had been in his mind from the moment he learned that the Apaches had carried off the females of Caleb Harland's household. It seemed heartless for him and his comrades to fight their way back to the post, without an effort to save the captives, and yet it will be understood from what has been related, that absolutely nothing could be done as matters stood. Indeed, it may be repeated, that this little squad of cavalry might count itself fortunate if all the members succeeded in getting out of the section where peril was on every hand.

There was something inspiring in the prospect of four men rescuing three prisoners from a strong war party of Apaches, but it was among the impossibilities. That was the reason why Lieutenant Whitcomb made no reference to it, until he saw the probability that a strong company of his friends were within call.

"I wonder what the captain must have thought after signaling as he did, to find I took no notice of it."

"What notice did he expect you to take?"

"It was agreed that whichever of us saw the sign, was to signal back that he understood it, by firing

his revolver three times in the air over his head."

"Since you failed to do that, I wonder that he did not remind you by doing something of the kind himself," remarked Bedford.

"It is that fact which makes me doubt that it was the captain after all. I am afraid it was not he, but another party of Apaches."

"There is one way of finding out," observed Windstrom.

"By making a scout in that direction?" inquired the lieutenant.

"The same."

While this appeared sensible, the young officer was not quite prepared to act upon it. He feared to move too far from the burned building, lest they should lose the chance to find out what had befallen the females in whom all felt a deep interest.

"Joggens," said he, "you and Walter may move in the direction of the camp fire or signal or whatever it was. You had better go on foot, since you won't run half the chance of being seen by the Apaches. It will be some risk to leave the ponies behind, but that can't be helped."

"What do you want us to do?"

"You will keep on till you find out what that smoke meant; if it *is* the captain, ask him to wait till he hears from me. Ray and I are going on a little enterprise of our own, and, if we pull through all straight, we'll report to him before midnight. We know how to communicate when we can't see each other."

"May I ask what your scout will be?" said Joggens.

"The trail taken by the party which burned this building and carried off the ladies is so plain that it can be traced without trouble. Ray and I will follow it."

"But it will soon be too dark to see the footprints."

"I have an idea that the Apaches have not gone far, and that we shall be able to locate them before sunset."

"Very well; if that is your order, Walter and I are ready; eh, Walt?"

"No news could be more agreeable," replied Windstrom, "as me cousin remarked when he larned his uncle had decased and left him a thousand pounds."

A few minutes were spent in hurried converse,

in order to make sure that the members of the party understood how to communicate with each other, when they should wish to reunite in the darkness.

"There is a moon to night," said the lieutenant, as they were on the point of separating, "and the sky is clear, but the moon doesn't rise until very late."

Joggens and Windstrom began stealing along the edge of the spur, toward the point two miles to the north, where the mystifying signal had been descried, while the course of the lieutenant and Bedford, for a time at least, was at right angles to the same.

The two younger men did not need to be reminded of the exceeding delicacy of the task they had undertaken. They were about to follow the trail of a party of murdering Apaches into the mountains. These redskins were the masters of every bit of low cunning of which the human race is capable, and, if they held any suspicion of such attempt, they would make the presumptuous troopers pay dear for it.

As Whitcomb had said, the trail was marked so plainly that it could be readily followed, as long as there was any light of the sun to guide

them. The Apaches could have felt no fear of a pursuing party, even if it numbered ten times as many as themselves ; for, among the wild fastnesses of the mountains, no body of white men could follow them successfully.

One of the most common artifices of the Apaches, when pressed hard, is to divide. Thus a party of a dozen will separate in two equal companies, and their pursuers, of necessity must do the same or concentrate upon one. In either event, the Apaches soon break again and continue this until the whole dozen are scattered and all following a different course.

Before dissolving into their original elements, the Apaches fix upon some rendezvous miles away. The pursuing cavalry or foot soldiers thus find themselves completely baffled, for that man is not yet born that can run down a single Apache, who is capable of trotting fifteen hundred feet up the sloping side of a mountain without a perceptible quickening of his pulse

CHAPTER XXXI.

A LAUGH.

BRIEF as was the distance walked by Lieutenant Whitcomb and Ray Bedford, it seemed to them that by the time they had gone a few dozen steps they were in one of the wildest portions of the mountains.

The slope of the ground was rapid, until the mere work of picking their way grew laborious, and caused both to breathe rapidly. Rocks, trees, boulders, bushes and undergrowth were encountered in such profusion that it would have been impossible for the surest footed burro to follow the same course. When the Apaches passed over that ground it must of necessity have always been on foot.

Neither of the young men was skilled sufficiently in trailing to tell how numerous was the party they were pursuing. It might have consisted of five or three times as many persons. The surface, too,

was not of a nature to show the imprint of a moccasin clearly; but, if either of the two wanted any additional proof that the Indians, whatever their strength, were accompanied by at least one of the female members of the Harland household, it was furnished by the sight of a piece of faded calico, that had caught on a projecting bush and was fluttering in plain sight.

Lieutenant Whitcomb picked it carefully, almost tenderly, from its resting place, and closely inspected it.

"It couldn't have been worn by any of the Apache squaws?" he remarked, inquiringly, passing it to his companion.

"No," was the sneering response of Ray; "no American Indian ever committed the offense of wearing anything as clean as *that*."

The pursuit, if such it may be called, was continued only a short way further, when, to the astonishment of both, the trail divided, one branch turning sharply to the right, while the other veered to the left.

"I don't understand *that*," said the lieutenant in a guarded voice, glancing furtively around.

"There are a good many things in this business

which neither of us is likely to understand."

That to which the officer referred was the lack of apparent cause for such division of the Apaches. The ground was quite steep, and enormous towering rocks were so plentiful that the course of necessity became winding and tortuous. So far as the white men could judge, there was no choice in the routes taken, and it was hardly to be supposed that the Indians felt any fear of pursuers.

But there was no time to speculate. The day was drawing to a close, and it would not be possible to follow the savages much further.

"Which way shall we turn?" asked Ray, looking in the face of his companion.

"I'll be hanged if I know, for it's beyond my power to tell the course of the ladies, and it's *they* we want to keep in mind."

"Suppose I take the right and you the left?"

"Very well; be careful, Ray, and don't venture too far; we will try to meet again at the base where we left the ponies."

Bedford nodded to signify he understood, and with the same promptness they had shown from the first, the two moved in directions so nearly

opposite that they almost immediately passed from each other's sight.

By this time twilight was stealing through the wild region, and both realized that the pursuit could not be continued much further. Because of that fact, they advanced with a celerity they would not have shown earlier in the day.

"This is ticklish business," said the lieutenant to himself, "and I have a feeling that trouble will come of it. Those miscreants are not far off."

There was something in the gathering gloom and darkness, the utter silence and desolation and the brooding danger, that was sufficient to try the nerves of the bravest person.

Halting just long enough to assure himself that he ran into no ambush, the West Pointer pushed on again, checking his pursuit a few rods further on.

The trail was still distinct and the scenery was growing wilder. The trees were mostly stunted pine, with many of the trunks gnarled and twisted into all manner of shapes. They did not grow thickly, but there was enough space between them to allow of the ready passage of men or animals. The tops, however, were close enough to shut out most of the sun's rays at midday.

While it was easy to select a course which wound around the immense rocks, yet such a path led up, down, to the right and left, and in every direction except a straight line. In some places a person was obliged to step upon bowlders and leap from point to point in order to continue his progress.

Had the lieutenant been following a single individual or even two or three, it would have been almost impossible to keep to the trail; but there were so many that as long as the twilight lasted he found little if any difficulty.

“How easy,” he reflected, as he paused for a moment, “for one of them to crouch behind that rock over there or the one to the left or the one just beyond and pick me off without giving me a chance to dodge or help myself—”

He suddenly caught his breath and leaped back, gun in hand, sure that a slight movement at the corner of one of the very masses of stones he was inspecting was that of an Apache drawing bead on him.

But the hour was the one in which the active imagination sees enemies where none exist, and second thought convinced the lieutenant he was

mistaken. His nerves, however, had received a shock which caused his heart to beat faster than was its wont, and he advanced with still greater care and hesitation.

It is probable that Lieutenant Whitcomb would not have gone beyond this point, had he not received proof just then that he was close to the Apache camp.

The mountain took such a steep slope a few rods further on, that it was clear the Apaches must have made a turn to one side or the other, a portion of the ascent being really perpendicular. In the event of being hard pressed they would have found the means of surmounting even such a formidable obstacle.

"I suspect, though I have no special reason for it," said the lieutenant to himself, "that the Apache camp is among the rocks and trees on the top of that bluff."

To his amazement there sounded on the air at that instant, from the very point he had in mind, a laugh---the laugh of an Indian!

Now, as is well known, although the American Indian sometimes smiles, despite the general legend to the contrary, it is rare that a wild one was ever

heard to indulge in laughter. His training leads him to avoid noises of that kind.

But young Whitcomb had heard an Apache laugh as heartily as himself, and there was no mistake in that sound ; one of the warriors in the camp on top of the bluff, from some unimaginable cause, laughed loud enough to be heard by the astonished officer among the rocks below.

The fact convinced him that his pursuit as yet was unsuspected, and encouraged him to push on.

It had become so dark that it was hard to follow the trail, and he gave over any attempt to do so. Instead, he sought the most direct means of reaching the crest of the bluff. The way was not difficult to find ; but extra care was necessary in the increasing darkness, and because he found it necessary to keep his gun in hand, ready for an emergency that was likely to arise at any moment.

The plucky fellow persevered and finally scaled the elevation. His reward was greater than even he anticipated, for almost immediately he came into full view of no less a personage than the renowned Geronimo himself !

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE APACHE CAMP FIRE.

LITTLE danger of any person who has met Geronimo forgetting his appearance. Even now, when he is such a peaceable farmer down in Alabama, with the rest of his once dreaded warriors, he is a subject of interest and curiosity to many who go far out of their way to see the famous leader of the Apaches.

Lieutenant Whitcomb, as a matter of course, recognized him immediately. There was no mistaking the broad, high cheek bones, the long, dangling black hair, ornamented with several stained feathers, the dark, bead-like eyes, and the grin which added to the natural hideousness of his countenance. There was nothing graceful or prepossessing about him. He was not tall, but possessed a stocky figure, capable, however, of an endurance which few white men could equal.

The lieutenant could not have desired a better

view. A bright fire was burning in the middle of an open space, and Geronimo was standing on the other side, exactly facing the scout, who thus saw him as distinctly as at midday. The blanket which the chief generally carried was cast aside, for the weather continued oppressively warm, even though the sun had set. He grasped the barrel of his rifle near the muzzle with his right hand, the stock resting on the ground, while the left was occupied mainly in manipulating a short, black clay pipe which he was smoking. His toggery was frowsy, unclean and ragged, though still capable of much service.

There were seven warriors with him, all terrible fellows, that could keep a regiment of United States soldiers on nettles; five were lolling and smoking on the ground in lazy attitudes, the air so tainted with the rank nicotine that the young officer easily detected it.

The two remaining officers gave their attention to a big piece of meat, undergoing a process of scorching by the blaze. Precious little cooking was it likely to receive, and, had there not been plenty of leisure at their command, they would as readily have eaten it raw, like so many tigers.

The sparkle and glisten of a tiny stream of water was observed in the glow of the firelight, a fact which doubtless was the cause of the spot being selected for the temporary camp.

This group, or body guard of Geronimo, would have held the attention of Lieutenant Whitcomb, but his eyes rested on something that was tenfold more interesting. Seated on a broad, flat stone at one side of the fire, but within the circle of light thrown out, were the mother, wife and daughter of Caleb Harland, the picture of woe and distress. They were the prisoners taken a brief while before, and the memory of the frightful scene and the loss of Buck Bragg and his companions must remain a sad memory forever with the afflicted group.

It was pitiful to see the brave struggle which the daughter made to sustain the others in their awful desolation. She sat in the middle, with the head of each resting on her shoulder, and the motion of her lips showed she was saying something to those whose lips remained mute. They were attired in plain, light clothing, suitable for that torrid latitude, but all were without any covering for their heads. Their capture was so like the

whirlwind that no time was given for any preparation for flight.

The picture was a striking one indeed—the pale, wrinkled face of the aged grandmother, with her hair as white almost as snow, and the smooth, symmetrical countenance of the young girl, with its wealth of raven black tresses, hardly more abundant, however, than those of the mother on the left.

The lieutenant's position was some distance beyond the circle of illumination. He lay on his face upon the ground, where the undergrowth almost covered him without obstructing his view of the party around the camp fire.

Much as he would have risked to rescue the hapless women, he saw that it was absolutely beyond his power to give them any help, until the conditions underwent a complete change. The lieutenant had already performed an exploit in following Geronimo into his mountain retreat and gaining a good look at him and some of his followers. Though nothing resulted from it, it was more than some of the most experienced scouts had been able to do.

The officer was struck by a fact which caused

him not only surprise but uneasiness. The affray with the Apaches, who came so near ambushing them on the open plain, was so lively, that he was confident of recognizing any member of the party, no matter where or when encountered. There was not one of them however, among the group gathered about Geronimo, who was the only member that Whitcomb did not look upon for the first time,

This fact proved that Geronimo had at least a dozen of his best warriors with him, with the probability that almost as many more were within call. Insignificant as such a force may seem to the reader it was sufficient to spread desolation and woe over an area of hundreds of miles of Arizona, and to defy for an indefinite time the most determined efforts of the veteran campaigners of the Southwest to capture or destroy them.

The lieutenant had been quite hopeful that the signal fire, seen late in the afternoon, was from his friend Captain Campereaux, since it was precisely the one that had been agreed upon ; but it was an imitation of the signal used by the Apaches themselves, others of whom as the officer had just learned, were near at hand. It must have been kindled under the eye of Geronimo, and carried

some potent message to the dusky fighters on the plains.

What was the import of that message? Ah, *that* was the question, to which it was vain to seek a reply until answered by the incidents themselves; but the lieutenant recalled with a shudder that he and his small command were in about as bad a situation as they could well be, without being actual prisoners.

The four were scattered in all directions. Windstrom and Joggens were stealing along the edge of the plain, on their way to the site of the signal fire, fully two miles away. Ray Bedford was in the mountains, not far off, hunting for the same group that was under the eye of his lieutenant. In the event of a slip on the part of any member of the company, he would be without the possibility of partial support even, unless in the case of Windstrom and Joggens.

Nothing was left for the lieutenant to do except to withdraw, bring his men together, seek out Captain Campereaux, and join in a vigorous pursuit of Geronimo and his warriors. There was little prospect of this being of the slightest help to the females, who could be carried off much faster than

they could be pursued. If Geronimo found they caused any inconvenience, he would not hesitate to slay every one of them.

The lieutenant was tempted, almost beyond his power of resistance, to draw bead upon Geronimo, and after dropping him in his tracks, rely upon the darkness and his own skill to extricate himself from his peril. Such an act, though seemingly cruel in itself, would have been the best possible service he could render the frontier, for with Geronimo slain, the revolt of the Apaches could be put down with little difficulty and many innocent lives saved.

The more he reflected upon it, the more inclined was he to make the effort, even though the chances were that he would be captured before he could get away, and subjected to a torturing death.

"I believe I'll try it!" he muttered, bringing his gun round in front preparatory to aiming and firing.

MY LITTLE "SPECIAL FRIEND"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A DARING EXPLOIT.

THE distance between Lieutenant Whitcomb and the Apache camp fire was so slight that, if he once pulled trigger, Geronimo was certain to fall with not a spark of life in his body.

The officer sighted carefully, and his finger was already pressing the trigger, when a warrior stepped exactly in front of the chieftain.

"Confound it!" muttered the lieutenant, "I shall have to wing *you*, too, but I want to make sure of *him*."

The Apache who thus assumed the part of an unconscious shield was not one of the original group, but came from the gloom just beyond the fire. He stood but a minute in front of the leader, when he shifted his position enough to allow once more a full view of Geronimo.

The officer was interested in the actions of this

man, who gesticulated and talked so vigorously, that his peculiar grunting voice was plainly heard, though of course, not a word could be understood.

Evidently he was a messenger, just in with important news for the leader, who also showed considerable excitement.

"What would I not give," reflected the lieutenant, "if I could know what is passing between them?"

The runner remained but a short time, when, evidently at the command of Geronimo, he started to bear away some message from him. Whitcomb's heart gave a quick throb, as he became aware that the warrior, instead of going back over the path he had just used, took a course which, if followed, was sure to lead him straight to the white man lying on the ground!

"My gracious! he's going to step on me," thought the latter, softly laying down his rifle and drawing his revolver. "If he does it will be worse than treading on a rattlesnake."

The officer was perhaps a dozen yards distant from the fire, the undergrowth being so slight that it offered really no resistance to his progress.

There was every reason to believe the warrior would follow a straight line, in which event it would never do for Whitcomb to stay where he was.

The Apaches are as keen of hearing as of sight, and cautiously as the lieutenant shifted his position to the left, he was fearful that the movement had been heard, but there was no help for it.

The blazing wood being directly behind the Apache, his figure loomed up large and distinct as he approached. The white man raised his shoulders so that he rested on his left elbow, while he grasped his Smith & Wesson in his right hand, prepared to fire the instant he was discovered, when he would bound to his feet and make off in the darkness.

As was anticipated, the Apache followed a bee line until he reached the edge of the small plateau. Thus he walked over the very spot where Lieutenant Whitcomb lay a moment before, and but for the slight change of position, discovery would have been certain. As it was, he could have seized one of the moccasins and flung the savage to the ground.

Having passed the white man, the Indian became

invisible to him as well as to his friends around the camp fire.

"That was a pretty close call," muttered the lieutenant, "but since he is eliminated, I will now give attention to Chief Geronimo again."

Fate, however, seemed to interfere to save the vindictive Apache, for the interruption that occurred immediately was of the most startling nature.

This time two warriors emerged from the darkness into the light of the camp fire, bringing a prisoner between them.

Lieutenant Whitcomb, to his consternation, recognized the captive as Ray Bedford.

By some strange fatality he had fallen into the power of his merciless enemies, while engaged on the same kind of reconnoissance that led his officer to run a risk which few would have faced.

The lieutenant's heart almost stood still when he saw his hapless comrade standing in front of Geronimo, a stalwart Indian on each side, one of them holding his rifle, another his pistol, while both seemed eager to receive the order of the chief to bury their knives in his body.

Even the women, sitting apart on a flat stone,

forgot their own wretchedness for the moment, and looked at the scene as though they could not understand it.

"Something must be done," said the lieutenant, feeling that he could never desert his friend in his extremity. "I'm not going to lie here and see him put to the torture without lifting a hand for him."

The warriors brought their captive directly in front of their chief, while the others were so interested that they gathered round to hear the explanation. Thus it came about that the backs of all, including Ray, were turned toward the young officer. Geronimo alone faced him, his ugly visage being in plain sight over the shoulder of the prisoner.

If the scene was exciting, that which followed almost immediately was tenfold more so. Geronimo began talking in a loud voice. The next minute, however, the lieutenant saw him raise one hand. The firelight flashed upon a knife, and there can be no doubt that he intended to bury it in the body of the prisoner, but, before he could do so, the athletic Bedford launched out his right arm with the quickness of lightning.

Catching Geronimo fairly in the face, the blow

sent him over on his back as if smitten by the hoof of a mule. At the same instant both fists shot right and left with equal quickness and power, the astounded Apaches going down like so many tenpins.

Lieutenant Whitcomb could not restrain his enthusiasm. He was so carried away by the exploit of the brave fellow, that he forgot his own peril, and shouted :

“Give it to them, Ray ! Give it to them !”

But it so came about that Ray kept his head better than did his lieutenant. He had been preparing for some such dash, and had formed his plan so well that he did not allow himself to be diverted from carrying it through to the end.

He had been lying on the ground, in a position similar to that of the lieutenant, when he was discovered by two Apaches prowling near. They belonged to the party that had formed the ambush on the plain, and were fortunate enough to discover the white man without his suspecting his danger. As a consequence, they came down on him like an avalanche before he could strike a blow in his own behalf.

But he was leveling matters now with a rush.

His blows right and left were given merely to clear the road. The instant he saw the way open, he bounded over one of the prostrate bodies, and without seeing whither he went, shot off in the gloom like a frightened deer.

Furious and effective as was the demonstration he made, it could not result in bringing all the Apaches to the earth. One of those who escaped was more active than his companions, and raising his tomahawk (with which weapon only a few of the Indians were supplied) he poised himself to launch it at the swiftly vanishing prisoner.

Had the hatchet left the hand of the thrower without hindrance, it would have cloven Bedford's brain or spine, but while it was poised over his head, the sharp crack of a rifle broke the stillness, and, as for that particular Apache, the subsequent proceedings interested him no more.

Good fortune followed the brave Bedford. While there were half a dozen directions which, if taken, would have carried him over the rocks and broken his neck, Providence saved him from that. He had no opportunity nor time to choose his course. Had he found himself on the edge of a precipice a hundred feet high, he would have made

the leap, rather than surrender to his enemies. That blow square in the face of Geronimo could never be forgiven.

Ray Bedford ran with all the desperate energy of his nature, knowing that it was do or die. It seemed to him that he had taken less than twenty paces, when all support vanished from under him. He had dashed off the edge of the plateau and was falling down, down, down, he did not know whither.

The descent was enough to injure him badly, even if he fell upon the soft earth, but that kind Providence that had stood by him thus far did not desert him now. He struck some limbs, which turned him over upon a clump of bushes, and so broke his fall that when he came to rest on the ground he was only slightly jarred.

His Apache pursuers were familiar with the place, and were too wise to imitate the leap, when the consequences were sure to be less favorable; but there was only a short distance to run to reach the spot where they knew he had struck.

But Ray Bedford wanted no one to apprise him of this danger. With an ejaculation of thanks for his extraordinary escape, he rose to his feet to leave the spot.

"I believe I am all here," he said to himself, "and they ain't far off, either ; this is a good place to emigrate from."

He could now afford to move with more deliberation and care, and he did so, feeling every step of the way. The broken ground was dangerous, and a single misstep was likely to be fatal.

"What I might have expected," he thought, coming to a halt and listening to the soft rustling near by ; "they have arrived."

Several of the Apaches were certainly near at hand. Although the moon was shining, the shadows were so deep that the ear alone could locate them. The fugitive crouched low, and kept as motionless as the rocks and tree trunks beside him. So long as he remained thus, he could not be found except by accident.

The Apaches were not the ones to persevere in a hunt after it was clear it was useless. The listening Bedford knew from the sounds that reached him that they were moving off, though a suspicion that it might be a ruse to induce him to betray himself caused him to hold his position a half hour after it seemed they had gone.

It was well he did so, for the very trick he sus-

pected was tried upon him. At the end of the half hour he heard the Indian that had been left behind stealing gently off, though, with all his care, he betrayed himself by a stumble.

"There's no doubt he is the last," concluded Bedford, beginning to feel his way out of the gloomy place, "and I'm tired of staying here."

Manifestly there was but one thing to do: that was to follow the descent of the mountain spur, which must soon take him to the edge of the plain which began so abruptly.

This Bedford proceeded to do with such skill that he made good progress. Here and there were openings among the stunted pines through which the faint moonlight made its way to the earth and helped him not a little in his labor.

He did not forget to stop at intervals and listen for his enemies, who, for aught he knew, might be at his heels.

It will be remembered that Bedford had been deprived of his gun and revolver, so that he would have been at a sad disadvantage had he found himself confronted by only a single Apache. He was anxious now to recover his horse and join his friends. They had the gun and pistol of Braxton,

and, if nothing happened, could give him as complete an outfit as before.

"I wonder how Lieutenant Whitcomb made out," the fugitive asked himself more than once. "I heard his gun, and he yelled something to me. That was a bad thing to do, but he wasn't anywhere in sight, and I guess he knows enough to take care of himself. It is going to be ticklish business for us all."

But the young man's success had been so marked up to this time that he could not help feeling encouraged. He hardly dared, just then, to venture on a signal to the lieutenant, but continued picking his way downward, until he had reached the base of the mountain.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT THE BASE OF THE MOUNTAIN.

By great good fortune the fugitive came out at the point where he had begun the ascent of the mountain spur. There were the ruins of the burned house, dimly visible in the faint moonlight, with the pungent smoke still ascending from them. Near by was the spot where the remains of poor Walter Braxton and the ranchman had been laid away in their last long sleep.

"The ponies can't be far off," he reflected, "provided they haven't been disturbed by the Apaches. My gracious! but he ran a big risk in leaving them so near, when there are more of the redskins about than we suspected."

He was now able to take his bearings, and proceeding with the same care he had shown from the first, he was not long in reaching the huge rock behind which he and his comrades had taken a rest at the close of the sultry afternoon.

The weather was frightfully hot. The perspiration was streaming from every pore, but our brave soldiers in the Southwest were accustomed to the flaming temperature, like that of Sahara itself, and in his excitement and anxiety, the soldier cared nothing for it. Bad as it was, it could not compare with what he underwent when lying in the scorching sand after the brush with the Apaches in ambush.

He recalled the precise spot where the four ponies were left, but he could not descry one of them now.

“They have been here,” concluded the fugitive, with a sinking heart, “and we are in a fine situation; suppose I should meet some of them now without so much as a pistol to defend myself——”

Just then he caught a soft, tremulous whistle, like the faint call of a night bird. He pricked his ears and shrank back among the shadows, afraid to reply lest it should prove a decoy of his enemies.

It was repeated so near that he started and turned his head.

Surely some one was creeping toward him, and even then was almost near enough to strike.

Bedford was on the point of making a dash

further to the rear, when a guarded but well known voice called to him:

"Whist! what's the matter with ye? It's meself, Walt Windstrom."

"Thank heaven!" was the fervent ejaculation of the affrighted soldier, "I was sure it was one of the redskins."

As he spoke, the famous scout straightened up, stepped forward and grasped his hand.

"Where is Joggens?"

"Here he is," replied that individual, also coming forward and taking his hand; "and now what's become of the lieutenant?"

"I hope it is well with him; but I don't know."

"Tell us what has happened."

The story was quickly related, the scouts listening with breathless attention to the stirring narrative.

"By the powers," said Windstrom, "but you had a great escape; it will be something to talk about after we get back to the fort."

"It would seem," added Joggens, "that since you did so well, the lieutenant ought to be able to pull out of the bad hole in which he may have stumbled; but these things are not governed by

the law of probabilities, else the ranchman would have beaten off the Apaches when they attacked his home."

"What's to be done? But tell me first how you made out."

"We had the best of luck," replied the New Englander; "we had no trouble in stealing along the edge of the mountain to the point where we saw the signal fire this afternoon."

"And you found a party of Apaches there?"

"Not a bit of it; Captain Campereaux and the boys are there. It was he who signaled to us, and he couldn't for the life of him understand why it was the lieutenant didn't answer as he had promised to do. The only guess he could make was that we didn't see the smoke; he was getting ready to make it still plainer or ride out to meet us, when we reached this place and were out of sight."

"Why didn't he send some one to give us notice?" was the natural query of Bedford.

"You know what a touchy fellow the captain is; he said the proposal to use an Apache signal came from the lieutenant, and he made up his mind that since he had kept his part of the agreement, he would leave him to find out for himself. Our

presence in his camp proved that Whitcomb had recalled his mistake. Then there was nothing to do but to await the coming of the lieutenant, and that's just what the captain is doing. He says that when we were all with him he will make another move against Geronimo."

Such being the case, the question was whether the three men should stay where they were until the return of the officer, or make all haste to the encampment of their friends and secure their aid in rescuing Whitcomb from his perilous situation.

The rifle and revolver that had belonged to Braxton were in the possession of Windstrom and Joggens, so that Bedford was quickly fitted out in as good form as before. Then they decided to stay where they were for a couple of hours. If Lieutenant Whitcomb failed to show up by that time, the conclusion was inevitable that serious ill had befallen him.

The ponies were near at hand, the scouts having removed them to a spot where there was less danger of discovery by any prowling Apaches.

Lying on the ground, with all their senses on the alert, the men lit their pipes and smoked, speaking in tones hardly above a whisper, while their hope

for their beloved leader grew less with the passing minutes.

"It's no use," finally said Joggens, coming to a sitting position, "he would have shown up before this had all been well."

"He may have reached the plain at some point quite distant," suggested Bedford, "and has not found his way here yet."

"It couldn't have been very far off," replied Joggens, "and it wouldn't take him long to locate himself."

"Like me, failing to find the ponies, he may have been at fault, or pushed on to the camp of Captain Campereaux.

Windstrom was about to protest against this explanation, when one of the ponies stamped his foot, but gave nothing in the nature of a neigh or whinny.

"Whisht!" whispered the scout, coming to his feet and assuming a crouching posture; "leave him to me and abide here."

Without waiting for any reply he vanished like a shadow.

When engaged on such scouts as we are describing, the intelligent animals of the men often prove

their best sentinels. Windstom was sure that something unusual had caused the peculiar stamping of one of the ponies. He hoped that it was the approach of the lieutenant, but doubted it.

Since the horses, in case he was not recognized, were likely to stamp again, he avoided detection by moving around the open spot where they were standing, keeping so well within the shadow that they could not see him. There was not the slightest breath of air, and he was confident they would not detect him by their delicate sense of smell.

He had hardly caught sight of the dim forms of the animals, when one of them not only stamped his foot but emitted a faint whinny. Knowing he had not been the cause of it, Windstrom hastened his pace and was quick to perceived that some one was among the horses.

It could not be the lieutenant, for aside from the improbability of his acting in that manner, the beasts would have recognized him as a friend.

"He is a thaif trying to run them off," was the conclusion of the scout, who, without stopping to reflect that there might be several Apaches there, dashed forward, threw himself on the dusky form,

and bore him to the earth before he could help himself.

The Indian proved to be a boy not more than half grown. He fought like a wild cat, and would have been an ugly antagonist for any one ; but he was caught at great disadvantage, crushed irresistibly to the earth and made prisoner despite his savage resistance.

Windstrom had him foul beyond question, but little did he suspect the identity of the young Apache.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE PRISONER OF STATE.

BRIEF as was the struggle of the young Apache, it was heard by Bedford and Joggens, who hurried to the spot. Not the slightest outcry was made by the savage, who gave even the powerful Windstrom all he wanted to do.

The first thought of Joggens was that other Apaches were at hand, but the fact that the single one was left to fight his battle alone, was proof that if there were any such, they knew nothing of what had taken place.

“What have you got?” asked Joggens, in a cautious voice.

“A rattlesnake,” replied Windstrom, panting from his exertion; “but I guess he can’t bite any more.”

In the dim light the others saw what the captor had noticed a minute before—that the prisoner was only a half grown boy, though, as has been stated,

he acquitted himself like a genuine warrior. Being allowed to rise to his feet, he stood grim and defiant evidently on the watch for some chance to bound off, no matter at what risk to himself.

“We’ll take him into camp,” said Bedford, “for we may be able to put him to better use than killing him.”

The belief was shared by all that it was idle to wait any longer for the return of Lieutenant Whitcomb, nor was it possible for the three to do anything in his behalf. Help, if it came at all, must come from Captain Campereaux. It was decided, however, to leave the officer’s horse behind, so that if the owner should reach the spot he would not be deprived of his valuable steed.

The young Apache was armed with a knife and rifle, which, of course, were taken from him, the probabilities being that the gun had belonged to a white man in the first place. Then the rope, which Joggens always carried with him, was looped between the elbows and the back of the prisoner, his hands being secured at the wrist, and fastened to Windstrom’s saddle-bow. With Bedford and Joggens on the right, the singular procession set out for the camp of Captain Campereaux.

It may seem strange to the reader, that since the fierce young captive could have brought his friends to his help by a single screech, that he did not do so ; but he could not have failed to be aware of the earnestness of those who held him captive. The first yawp on his part would have been the end of him, as Joggens took pains to impress upon him by means of broken Spanish and gestures.

Then, too, had his captors been determined to run him into camp, they could have placed him, in his helpless condition, on one of the ponies and galloped off with the prize.

But the journey was finished without interruption of any kind. Captain Campereaux was too much of a veteran to be caught off his guard in the Indian country. His most reliable scouts were on duty in every direction, and it was impossible for Geronimo or any of his men to surprise *that* camp.

Thus it was that the horsemen were stopped some distance off, and obliged to give an account of themselves. This was readily done, and a few minutes later they were in the presence of the peppery captain himself.

“Helloa !” he exclaimed, in his offhand way ; “what have you got there ?”

“A young specimen of the genus *Apache*,” replied Bedford.

The captain had been sitting in the light of a small camp fire, smoking his pipe as the party came up. He rose, returned their salutations, and then looked curiously at the prisoner, who was as dark browed, scowling and defiant as ever.

Without replying to the remark of Bedford, he scrutinized the youth still more closely, as though unusually interested.

“Turn him round to the light, Walt, so as to give a better view of him,” he said. “There! I suspected it. Do you know who he is?”

His captors could not form a guess as to his identity.

“He is a son of Geronimo: the old fellow had him with him when he visited the post last summer; the chief thinks a heap of that youngster, and he is a chip of the old block.”

“We ought to be able to do considerable with him,” remarked Bedford, with a flutter of hope.

“So we had and so we *shall*; we’ll exchange him for the prisoners that Geronimo has. He will count for much more than he is worth.”

All this time the captive was standing as proud,

erect and scornful as though he were a chief listening to the appeal of some condemned criminal for his life. His hands were fastened behind his back, and the thong that had been tied around his elbows remained in its place. Windstrom was on the point of removing it, when the announcement of the captive's identity decided him to take every possible care to prevent his getting away.

"Whatever happens," said Captain Camper-eaux, "that imp must not give us the slip; he holds the fate of those women that you were telling about, and more than likely that of Lieutenant Whitcomb as well."

"I'm afraid they've got him," remarked Jogens.

"To my mind there isn't any doubt of it. If he had kept his senses, and remembered the signal he asked me to give him, there wouldn't have been any trouble. But there's no use crying over spilt milk—helloa! is that you, Kit?"

One of his own scouts at that moment approached to report, and it proved an important report indeed. He had been out for several hours on the trail of Geronimo. He had tracked him to the same spot on the small mountain plateau, where

he was seen by Bedford and Lieutenant Whitcomb, but the scout did not reach the place until after the flurry caused by the escape of Bedford.

The lieutenant's enthusiasm got him into the very trouble that had been suspected. He made a valiant fight, but despite all he could do, he was overwhelmed, disarmed and borne into the presence of Geronimo himself, who was in a state of fury, that made him eager to visit the young officer with the worst possible torture he could conceive.

The apprehension was general that the poor fellow had already undergone frightful suffering, and that it was too late for a rescue. The great Apache leader was a man of strange moods and whims, and there was no calculating what cranky notion he might take into his head.

Kit, the scout, added the information that the chief and his small party of warriors had made a change of base; and now that they knew how closely they had been followed, it would be impossible to locate or run them down.

It may seem that little thought was given to the three hapless females, who had been bereft so cruelly of their protector; but there was not a

heart among all the scouts that was not deeply touched. It may be said, however, that, inasmuch as the greater includes the less, their ultimate fate was interwoven with that of the lieutenant. Whatever measures might be taken to restore him to liberty would be equally effective in their favor, while Geronimo was quite certain to hold them in such less estimation when balanced against the officer, that they would count little more than a makeweight.

CHAPER XXXVI.

CAPTORS AND CAPTIVES.

UNFORTUNATELY, all this apprehension concerning Lieutenant Dick Whitcomb was justified.

The natural consequence of his ardor in favor of Ray Bedford, who performed such a gallant exploit, was that before he could extricate himself he was surrounded by the angered Apaches, who bore him, stunned and helpless, to the earth, where he was quickly disarmed and made a prisoner.

It was somewhat curious that he was not instantly killed; but it is likely that Geronimo and his men saw his importance, because of the uniform he wore, and understood the use to which he might be put in order to gain good terms from his enemies.

He was so securely bound that it was impossible for him to escape without help, and, to prevent anything of the kind, Geronimo quickly effected a change of camp, penetrating further into the

mountains, where it was almost impracticable to follow him. Then his scouts arranged such a perfect watch that no man, white or red, could cross it without detection.

Lieutenant Whitcomb found he had exchanged situations with Bedford, and it was his own fault that such was the fact. He realized from the first that the only possibility of regaining his freedom was through the vigorous intervention of his friends. He could only hope that Captain Campereaux and his strong force were in the neighborhood, for no positive information had yet reached him on that point.

While the young officer conducted himself with a certain dignity, he strove to avoid giving his captors unnecessary offense. Geronimo rarely forgot the face of one he had seen, and the glance which he cast at his prisoner left no doubt he recognized him. Still the latter made no attempt to take any advantage of the fact, but held his peace; and, when the start further into the mountains took place, he obeyed without the least holding back.

He ventured, however, to offer some help to the ladies, especially to the eldest, who naturally found trouble in picking her way over the rocky surface.

Seeing the Indians offered no objection, he did all he could, and finally uttered a few words of sympathy to them in their affliction.

"Yes," replied Fanny; "I do not see that there is any hope, and mother and grandmother are in such despair that their hearts are broken."

"You have been stricken indeed; but since the chief has spared you thus far, there surely is ground for belief that he will continue to do so. Your chances are certainly better than *mine*."

"I cannot understand how that can be; I am glad the other prisoner got away, and my heart sank when you were brought in."

"It was due to my own rashness; but I am hopeful that a force of our cavalry are near, and may be able to strike a blow for us."

"How can they do it? If Geronimo finds he is likely to lose us, he will put us all to death."

There was no combating this view, since it was the one which presented itself to the lieutenant himself, and the reply he made did nothing to lift the burden from the heart of the young girl.

The bits of conversation were held as they gained the chance while laboring forward, with the Apaches all round them. In the darkness

this was the hardest kind of work, and, but for the kind help of the young officer, the ladies would have fared badly indeed.

The halt was made about a fourth of a mile beyond the first camp in one of the wildest and most inaccessible portions of the mountains. A small fire was quickly kindled by a couple of the warriors, in such a situation that it could not be seen a hundred feet in any direction. Then most of the Apaches scattered to keep watch for the approach of their enemies.

Thus it may be said that the hostile camps, within a couple of miles of each other, were each so sharply guarded as to be absolutely safe against surprise.

Geronimo and two warriors were left in charge of the captives, no one of whom, not even the lieutenant himself, was bound. Such binding might take place soon, but it was not required as a matter of safety, since Whitcomb himself realized there was not the shadow of a chance to get away.

The intentions of Geronimo cannot be known of a certainty, but on one point there is no doubt: he would have shown no more mercy than a famishing tiger.

But within ten minutes after the arrival at the new camp, an interruption took place. An Apache messenger appeared with more important tidings than any that had yet reached the dusky leader. The latter evidently held the soldiers in little dread, for he had fought them before. His own animals were safely hidden still further in the mountains, where no white man could steal or harm them, and he did not fear molestation while his own camp was so vigilantly guarded.

Lieutenant Whitcomb, standing beside Miss Harland, while the other ladies were seated on the ground, closely watched the face of the chief, as he talked with the messenger, who was one of the most repulsive Apaches on whom they had ever looked.

The chieftain was so occupied with the news brought to him by the runner that he paid no attention to his captives. Knowing they were secure, he doubtless felt they could wait.

"Miss Harland," said the lieutenant, who like the girl was closely watching the couple, "you have lived long enough in this barbarous country to know something of the language of the natives. Can't you get an inkling of what is going on?"

"If they were a little closer," she replied, "I believe I could; but the chief has his back turned toward us and does not talk very loud; I wonder whether it can concern us."

"I have speculated on the same point, but I cannot understand what shape matters should take that could cause any such agitation on the part of the old fellow; he has us in his power, and the President of the United States himself could not frighten him into sparing us if he didn't choose to do so."

"Then it may be that Captain Campereaux has secured some advantage which has frightened Geronimo."

The lieutenant shook his head.

"That is impossible; the time may come when the chieftain is run to earth, or when he will get tired of destroying, but after his escape the other night, I don't see any other possible ending to the war. There is only one thing that I feel certain about."

"What is that?"

"That if it is your good fortune to be restored to your father, he won't hesitate to emigrate from this country as soon as he can."

Pretty Fanny forgot her sorrow for the moment, and smiled at the abrupt turn of the remark. Although the young officer saw no ground for hope, he could not bear to have her give up in despair.

"Your mother and grandmother bear it well," he added, referring to a striking truth that he had noticed before.

"Yes," replied Fanny, "they both surprise me; mother is naturally courageous and strong of body, but grandmother is quite feeble."

"It must have been very trying and hard for her."

"It could not be otherwise, as it was to all of us."

"Since we are likely to be left alone a few minutes, Miss Harland, I would like to hear what took place at your home after we left yesterday."

The brave girl shuddered as she made answer.

"It was terrible—terrible. Poor Buck and the others were as brave and devoted as they could be, but he had too much confidence. I believe he was half offended at the proposition you made for us to go to the Fort with you, for he looked upon it as a reflection upon his ability to protect us."

"Joggens and I suspected as much, though we were so impressed with your peril that we would not let it prevent our urging the departure."

"It was a woful mistake that your counsel was not heeded, but," added the girl with a sigh, "it is all past now. After you rode off, Buck and the others galloped off a short way to look after the cattle; they could discover nothing wrong with them, and came back to the house about sunset without having caught the first sight of an enemy.

"They were too wise, however, to allow that to disarm misgiving. Grandmother insisted so strongly that the Apaches would be led by revenge to visit us again, that every possible precaution was taken."

"What could you do more than you did every night?" asked the lieutenant.

"Little except to keep strict watch. Everything was made strong and secure as it could be, and Buck himself undertook to stand guard until midnight. Neither mother, grandmother nor I removed our clothing, but we all fell into an uneasy slumber before the night was half gone. Mother had an idea that father would soon arrive, and I remember she cautioned Buck several times not to fire at any suspicious person he might see until sure it was an enemy.

"We never shall be able to know what really

took place. I was awakened by the reports of guns, and, when I sprang up, I saw the whole building was in flames. Mother and grandmother had awakened first, and each of them had caught my hand and we hastened out of doors. By the time we were fairly beyond reach of the fire, we were in the hands of the Apaches who had caused all this woe."

"But Buck and the others—did you see nothing of them?"

"Not one of us saw or heard a thing; we thought it possible they might have got away, but——"

"You have no such thought *now*, Miss Harland!" said Dick, so impressively that she started and asked:

"Why not?—ah, of course, I might have known." she hastened to add, quick to catch the meaning of the look rather than the question asked by Dick.

"Well," she added with another sigh, "I am not sure that fate was not more merciful to them than to us."

"You must not despair; your mother and grandmother are depressed, as they cannot help being, but they show a wonderful calmness——"

"Sh!" she interrupted, raising her hand, as a

warning for him to hold his peace. "I caught something said by Geronimo just then."

"What was it?"

"The chief asked him '*When*' and the reply was '*After the sun went down.*' Then Geronimo asked him '*Where,*' and the full reply I could not hear; can you form any idea what they referred to?"

Dick shook his head.

"It is impossible. Of course he spoke of some events which took place after sunset, but there have been a good many things in which we are all concerned, that have happened since the sun went down.

As the reader has suspected, the chief was agitated by the tidings that his favorite son was a prisoner of the cavalry. It was natural that Geronimo should be stirred, as he was not often stirred, and it will be understood by the reader that it was altogether beyond the ability of Lieutenant Whitcomb and Miss Harland to form any conjecture as to the cause of the excitement, so long as no tangible hint reached their ears.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NEGOTIATING.

ABOUT this time, matters began to assume an interesting phase in the camp of the troopers under Captain Campereaux. He could no longer doubt that his young lieutenant was a prisoner in the hands of Geronimo, whose son in turn was a captive of the cavalry. The hope was that an exchange could be effected by which Whitcomb would be restored to liberty, but there was some misgiving that it was too late to bring about the consummation, since it seemed unlikely that the Apache leader would spare Whitcomb very long.

"If any harm has befallen the lieutenant," said the captain, compressing his lips, "it will be all day with that imp. I'm not one of those sentimentalists who believe the only way in which to treat a red-skin is to cuddle him up like a baby."

The captain repeated his injunctions against allowing the slightest chance for the escape of the

young Apache. He knew enough of the slippery character of his people to know that he would get away if there was an earthly possibility of such a thing being done. The officer attested his earnestness by declaring that he would hold his custodians personally responsible, and the man or men who allowed the fellow to leave would be summarily shot.

Such being the situation, it will be agreed that there was little hope of the dusky captive joining his parent, until Captain Campereaux gave consent.

Nothing would seem more unlikely than that Geronimo, with only his few warriors, would venture to attack the camp, and yet as much precaution was taken as if such attack was a certainty. It is on record that the chieftain once stole into a small camp, where one of his wives was held as a hostage, seized the wife of an officer, and told her that the only way to save her life was by pointing out the tent in which his dusky partner was held. The terrified white woman did as commanded, whereupon Geronimo set her down, dashed into the tent, caught up his own wife and made off with her, before any precautions could be taken to prevent him. Many shots were fired, but, as usual, the Apache got away without a scratch.

There was no thought that he would make any direct attack on the troopers, whose guards were doubled, but the fear was that he and several of his most daring warriors might attempt some desperate scheme, which like many such schemes often owe their success to their very desperation.

Sure enough, Captain Campereaux, who remained up quite late talking and smoking with the surgeon and others, was told before it was yet midnight that there were Apaches in the vicinity. The faint rustling among the undergrowth, and a cautious signal now and then could be attributed only to that cause. The body-guards of the Apache prince reported also that his conduct confirmed the suspicions of the others. He was uneasy, rising on his elbow, looking around in the gloom and once he actually replied to the signal.

“That’s right,” said the captain well pleased. “The news is sure to be carried straight to Geronimo, if he has any doubt remaining and the way will be opened for negotiation—helloa!”

Incredibly cunning as the Apache is, he now and then overreaches himself, like ordinary mortals. Josh Joggens and Walt Windstrom were the agents in one of the most brilliant little affairs in the his-

tory of scouting in the Southwest. Well aware that several of the dusky scouts were prowling near, they formed a scheme of their own for the capture of one of them.

With a skill which few others could have equaled, they manœuvered until they located the warrior fixed upon. Then Joggens held his attention in front by a series of delicate manipulations, which convinced him that the only possible danger which could threaten was from that direction.

This gave Windstrom his chance, and permitted him to steal near enough to lean upon and pin the Apache to the earth. Before any of his comrades could rush to his help, the scouts ran him into camp and into the presence of Captain Campereaux.

That officer was delighted, and complimented the scouts on their clever exploit, and it certainly was clever in every respect. Then by his direction, the sullen captive was taken into the presence of Geronimo's son, so that there could remain no possible doubt of the chieftain learning the truth. They were allowed to exchange a few words, after which the warrior was brought back to the captain.

"Tell him," said he, addressing Joggens, who could make himself understood in the Apache lingo,

“to go back to Geronimo with word from me that the fate of his son rests with him. If he will send us the young officer and the three white women, we will let him have his son without a hair of his head harmed ; but if he does not do so, we will shoot his son, and leave his dead body lying on the plain for the vultures to peck at.”

The captain narrowly watched his own scout and the Apache as these words were filtrated into the brain of the prisoner. The ugly countenance showed little emotion, though his black, bead-like eyes remained fastened on the countenance of the lank trooper, while the message was repeated in a broken way.

“Are you sure he understands it?” asked the captain, when Joggens ceased speaking.

“I am sure of it.”

“You don’t think he doubts *my* earnestness, do you?”

“He surely has no reason for such doubt ” replied the scout, with a smile.

“All right ; let him go !”

The Apache was told that he was at liberty to leave the camp. He showed no surprise at the unusual proceeding, for he could not have failed to

understand the cause. Disdaining to show any haste, he wheeled about and walked away with the deliberation of a conqueror; but, when once fairly enveloped in darkness, he vanished like an arrow shot from the bow.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

"WE have now only one thing to dread," remarked Captain Campereaux to the surgeon, after the Apache had departed on his mission.

"What's that ?"

"Geronimo may have put Whitcomb out of the way before he found out we had his son."

"We shall not have to wait long after sunrise to-morrow to learn. If Whitcomb has been shot, of course Geronimo will use all his cunning to conceal it until after his heir is delivered into his hands."

"He has fooled us several times, but he won't fool me in this business. We won't loosen our grip on the young scamp until we are dead sure of the others. The chief thinks a good deal of that son, and, since he knows we will keep our pledges and make no attempt to trick him, and that he has only to lose by such attempt on his part, he will make a fair exchange if it is in his power to do so."

A few minutes later Captain Campereaux was surprised by the arrival of another outsider in camp.

One of the guards, while on duty, caught the outlines of a horseman in the gloom. After challenging him and exchanging some questions and answers, he learned that he was a white man, and invited him to come forward.

The invitation was accepted, and, as the man rode into the lines and dismounted, he announced himself as Caleb Harland, the owner of the ranch burned the evening before.

The distress of the man may perhaps be imagined, when hurrying forward, he found his home in ashes and no signs of any of his family. The charred remains of the bodies having been buried he did not know what had become of the ranchmen.

Harland was an experienced campaigner, but an almost unaccountable good fortune saved him from the Apaches that were so numerous in the vicinity. At a loss what course to take, he rode off aimlessly over the prairie, and was guided by Providence in the direction of the camp of the troopers. He caught the glimmer of the fire in the distance, and, after some maneuvering, became convinced that

he was near friends. Then he rode forward, as has been stated.

He now learned for the first time the truth respecting his family. He was inexpressibly shocked to find that Buck Bragg and the other two men were slain, but his relief was great when told that his own relatives were alive, and that in all probability they would be exchanged on the morrow.

With this assurance, the stricken father and husband was forced to be content ; but it need not be said that, tired as he was from his terribly long ride during the hot day and far into the night, he did not once close his eyes in sleep.

He admitted the great mistake he had made in staying in the Apache country so long, after learning of the peril, which was greater than ever. He had returned fully decided to remove at once to a ranch in Western Texas, for the purchase of which he had been negotiating with his brother.

“ I ought to have done it before,” murmured the distressed father, “ and now it may be too late —too late ! ”

It was not until late that Captain Campereaux fell into an uneasy slumber, which continued until

after the sun had been up for fully an hour, when he received surprising news.

The guards reported that nothing more was seen of the Apaches after the departure of the prisoner who was conducted into the presence of the son of Geronimo.

The tidings brought to the leader of the United States cavalry were, that a squad of Indians had appeared on the plain only a short distance off bearing a flag of truce.

This would have been astonishing in any case, for not often did such a thing occur during hostilities in the Southwest. As has been stated, it was a difficult thing at any time for Geronimo or his followers to produce a piece of goods of the requisite color, in view of their well known practices and theories concerning cleanliness, not to mention their antipathy to all customs relating to civilized warfare.

As was afterwards ascertained, the indispensable emblem was furnished by the white linen apron of Miss Fanny Harland.

The captain hurriedly prepared himself and rode to the edge of the prairie to gain a sight of the flag of truce. He saw three Apache warriors, mounted on their ponies, that were standing motionless

two hundred yards or more away on the plain, with the faces of all turned toward the camp.

One of the riders was a rod or so in advance of the others, holding the spotless linen in one hand, and slowly waving it above his head to attract the attention of the troopers.

The sight was a strange one indeed, and there could be no mistaking the meaning of the demonstration. Captain Campereaux smiled as he reflected that the scheme he had in mind was working so satisfactorily, though he still felt some misgiving concerning Lieutenant Whitcomb. Without summoning any companion, the officer spurred his horse forward, fluttering his own handkerchief in front of his face as an answer to the hail of the other.

By many the action of the leading officer of the scouts might be considered rash, since the treacherous nature of the Apaches rendered it unwise at any time to trust them ; but he had no fears of anything of the kind. To him the appearance of these warriors with the flag of truce was unquestionable proof that the misfortune that had befallen Geronimo's son was known to his father, who was anxious to secure his safety.

Among the Apaches were a few who could talk English tolerably well, while, as already stated, many of the white scouts picked up enough knowledge of their mongrel tongue to express themselves quite readily in it. Captain Campereaux was not among these, but he counted on the probable fact that one of the visitors at least knew something of English. He was not mistaken in this belief, although for the benefit of the reader we give a liberal interpretation.

“Why do you ask me to talk with you?” inquired the captain.

“We bring word from Geronimo, the great chieftain of the Apaches, on whom the Great Spirit——”

“There! that will do,” interrupted the captain, his temper rising: “Geronimo isn’t that sort of fellow; he is a lazy, thieving vagabond, and I would like the chance of filling him so full of lead that he would weigh three tons and a half. If you come from the scamp, let me hear what word he sends.”

“He has the white soldier a prisoner in his hands.”

“So I supposed,” coolly replied the captain.

“And you have a young warrior—the son of Walthus, one of our men from San Carlos——”

“That’s a lie !” interrupted the angered officer, who saw through the little trick ; “ we haven’t the son of Walthus, but the son of Geronimo.”

The Apache did not deny it nor show any embarrassment because of the instant detection of his falsehood.

“Geronimo will give you the white man for the young warrior.”

Captain Campereaux was too wise to show eagerness to accept the proposal of Geronimo’s ambassador. The proposal itself assured the young officer’s safety, and the heart of the elder gave a throb of pleasure at the realization of this fact.

But there were others concerned. The survivors of poor Caleb Harland’s family must not be forgotten.

“I wouldn’t mind making the trade,” replied the captain, “if you hadn’t any one else with you except the soldier ; but the only proposition that I will agree to is this : I will give Geronimo *all* the Apaches we have, on condition that he will give us *all* the white persons he has.”

In other words, the captain would exchange the

young heir to the Apache throne for Lieutenant Whitcomb and the female captives.

The three Indians appeared to be surprised by this proposition. The one who carried the flag of truce and who did all the talking, turned his head and had a brief conference with his companions.

“The words of the white man are strange to us,” said the messenger, turning back to the officer; “we must take them to Geronimo and bring back what he says.”

“All right; you needn’t hurry. This young scamp that we have in camp is getting uneasy, and like enough will try to give us the slip; if he does, our men are ordered to bore him full of bullet holes—but take your own time.”

This statement seemed to startle the listeners, and there was another brief consultation, just as the captain expected there would be. If any ill should befall the precious son of the Apache leader through the blundering of his messengers, they would be forced to suffer a fearful penalty.

They gave the captain to understand that they would soon be heard from again, and wheeling about, galloped off, taking a course parallel to the

spur of mountains, until out of sight. The officer came back at a leisurely pace to his men, to whom he announced that the four captives in the possession of Geronimo would soon be exchanged for the son of the chieftain.

The arrangements were completed by those who understood Apache nature. The white men were bound by honor to carry out their part of the agreement, and no one had a thought of doing otherwise; but the treacherous character of the American Indians leads them to take advantage of any chance that may present itself. The point, therefore, was to prevent any such temptation being placed in their way.

The decision was, that when the Apache party appeared with the captives, the same number of scouts, fully armed, would go forward with the dusky prisoner in custody. These white men would be on the alert, and at the first evidence of "crooked work," would make sure of bringing down the son of Geronimo. At the same time, they considered themselves competent to handle the guards themselves.

Captain Campereaux would hold all the rest of the scouts mounted and ready to dash to the help

of the advance the instant it became necessary. Thus the opportunities on each side would be as nearly equal as it was possible to make them.

The same three Apaches that had borne the flag of truce soon reappeared, and the captain, who was watching for them with his glass, reported, after a quick scrutiny, that all the prisoners were with them. The guards were mounted as before, but Lieutenant Whitcomb and the ladies were on foot, so shut in by their captors that there was no possibility of escape.

The leading warrior still fluttered his emblem of peace, and halted at the same spot where he had stood during the interview some time before, awaiting the approach of the white men.

They had not long to wait. Three of the scouts, one flourishing the white flag, advanced with their ponies on a dignified walk, with the son of Geronimo striding directly in front, where he was under the command of their guns.

Meanwhile, every eye of the remaining scouts and those of Captain Capereaux himself, was fixed on the group, which quickly coalesced.

It was a critical minute when the leader of the scouts motioned to their captive to walk over to

his people and join them. The sullen youth obeyed, and the scout called out:

“Come, lieutenant; it’s *your* turn now.”

Without stirring, Lieutenant Whitcomb turned his head and signified by a gesture that the ladies were to precede him. Fanny Harland, with her mother on her arm on one side and her grandmother on the other, moved slowly forward, the two younger suiting their steps to the strength of the eldest, who leaned heavily on her support.

The young officer fell in behind, and a dozen steps carried the little group among their friends.

Instead of wheeling and riding off, the scouts remained facing the Apaches, prepared for whatever might come. The latter acted as though they did not observe this evidence of distrust, though they could not have failed to do so. The released captive, with a single bound, threw himself on one of the ponies behind the bearer of the flag of truce, who dashed off at full speed, with the others at his heels.

They glanced back several times, but whenever they did so they saw the cavalrymen sitting grimly on their horses, ready for them. When the distance became beyond rifle shot, the scouts faced about

and rode slowly back to the camp of Captain Campereaux. The exchange had been effected much more successfully than any one would have dared to believe possible.

During this impressive interview Caleb Harland kept out of sight in the background. He was so nervous and unstrung by his anguish and his alternate hope and fear, that he dared not trust himself to ride out while the exchange was under way. Coolness and self-restraint were necessary, and he knew he would be likely to spoil everything by rushing forward to embrace his loved ones.

But when the women were brought into the lines, and each in turn threw herself into his arms, and their tears of joy mingled, there was not a dry eye among the spectators, whose lives had accustomed them to the most affecting scenes.

Lieutenant Whitcomb, too, received the heartiest congratulations of his comrades and brother officers, for his escape, all things considered, was one of the most remarkable in the history of the war on the Southwest border.

As for Geronimo, little need be added concerning him. Captain Campereaux pushed the pursuit as sharply as he could; but, as before, the wily

miscreant baffled him continually. After a time the Apache leader seemed to weary of being continually hunted like a wild animal, and he knew there could be no rest for him so long as he continued to defy the United States authorities.

The consequence was, as the reader doubtless knows, that he finally accepted overtures which resulted in the surrender of himself and the leading hostiles with their families. They were transferred to Florida, and finally to a pleasant reservation on an Alabama farm, where, at this writing, they are leading the lazy, harmless life, which seems so congenial to the American race.

Caleb Harland and his family accompanied the troopers to Fort Grant, where they stayed until safe means was found for removal to their new home in Western Texas. Oddly enough, they became involved, within the following year, in a series of strange experiences in the Lone Star State, the particulars of which are given in the story of "The White Mustang."

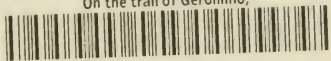
THE END.

The second volume of the "Wild Adventure Series" is entitled, "The White Mustang; a Tale of The Lone Star State."

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